Commentary

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Washington's Biggest Scandal
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Why the New Workfare Won't Work
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Movies: Enter the Chinese
Richard Grenier

The "Little Woman" of Little Rock
Midge Decter

Books in Review: Suzanne Garment/Jon D. Levenson/Harvey Klehr/Peter L. Berger/Williamson Murray

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Letters from Readers

Abortion: Round 2

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As a long-time friend and admiring reader of COMMENTARY, I have been distressed by a tendency I have sensed in recent articles to adopt a position similar to those who oppose abortion for (almost) any reason, a tendency confirmed in the long and tendentious article, "On Abortion," by James Q. Wilson [January].

Although Mr. Wilson has argued eloquently in your pages that most people know what is "moral" even though they may have a hard time defining it, he seems to have great difficulty recognizing that most women know what is meant by the value and significance or quality of life when contemplating the fate of a child who is brought into the world unwanted and unloved. For that is at the heart of the matter, and no amount of church history, philosophy, or legal tautology concerning constitutional rights of either fetus or society should divert us from it.

I have no quarrel with those who, on religious grounds, hold that human life, *all* such life, is, to use Mr. Wilson's word, "sacred," so long as they do not seek to impose their religious views on those who do not share them. Such persons may equally argue against the death penalty under any circumstances, even if it were to be conclusively shown (which I do not here argue it has been) that the failure to exact it results in the death of others more innocent than those it would fell. I do, however, quarrel with those who, like Mr. Wilson, would castigate as immoral all those who may consider the abortion of an unwanted fetus a far more moral and responsible act than its carriage to term.

In an ideal world, in which loving care would be assured for each newborn infant, Mr. Wilson's arguments might be more persuasive. In the real world, in which the provision of such care falls predominantly upon the mother, it is an unconscionable imposition, both upon the woman with an unwanted pregnancy and the society which will bear the burden of an unwanted child and adult, to interfere with such a woman's innate right to decide whether or not it is *right*, in the most profoundly moral sense of that word, for her to bring another life into the world.

It may not be pleasant for the fastidious to contemplate, but, in a world of finite resources, an unacknowledged triage, whether conscious or unconscious, is always taking place. Legislators allocate limited resources to one public need, knowing full well that, by doing so, another will go untended. We lavish more care on our own children than we spare for those of others. We choose the charities we support without worrying too much about others, perhaps more worthy. The medic on the battlefield or in the emergency room must choose who, among the many calling for his help, will first receive it, to the possible fatal detriment of others.

Mr. Wilson mentions the anguish that must accompany any decision to withdraw a life-support system from an elderly comatose patient. Yet if we adopt his prescription for the *forced* viewing of the photographed development of the fetus before a woman would be *allowed* to abort, we should, perhaps, also insist on the forced viewing of the physical deterioration and death agonies of persons suffering from accident or ailment before family and physicians would be allowed to decide if scarce medical resources should be made available or life-support systems withdrawn from any patient.

To paraphrase Mr. Wilson's exhortation: "What kind of people are we that we cannot say legislatively that human life is precious and, therefore, that *any* life must be given every known medical resource to save it?" Not to worry that such resources are limited. Not to fret that providing them in *this* case must, inevitably, mean withholding them in another. Not to trouble about the costs, financial, emotional, and, yes, even moral that other family members must bear; that *their* lives may, thereby, be deprived of any meaningful value. Not once does Mr. Wilson contemplate the searing effect that even carrying an unwanted fetus may impose upon the mother, her family, and others, to say nothing of the consequences of the unwanted birth. The fetus is

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"sacred," after all; other considerations, the lives of others, need not concern us.

I suggest that the loving care, to say nothing of the minimal material resources, necessary for a child to develop into a reasonably happy, functioning, and fulfilled adult is also a scarce and limited resource. Our cities are already filled with dysfunctional, illiterate, brutal semi-savages who express their own understanding of the meaning and value of life by wreaking havoc on the lives of others. They were not aborted. Their lives are sacred. Good enough. But must we add to their numbers by castigating and condemning women who simply do not want to give birth, for whatever reason, knowing, as we must, that an unwanted child cannot be a happy one and, most likely, will grow up to harm both himself and others?

It would require an article as long as Mr. Wilson's to expose the many fallacies and straw men in his argument. Suffice it to say that very few of those who argue so learnedly for the sacred quality of *nascent* human life (as opposed to already existing life with all its messy problems) inconvenience themselves by *personally* adopting the unwanted children they would oblige others to bear. Nor are they notorious for the *personal* aid and comfort they bring to those victims of rape and incest whose horror Mr. Wilson would compound by condemning them to view his instructive cinema, if not actually to carry and finally bear a child whom no one wants.

I have previously concurred with other writers in your pages who have deplored the creative social engineering of some members of our Supreme Court. Happily, Mr. Wilson does not sit among them.

HENRY SHERMAN
New York City

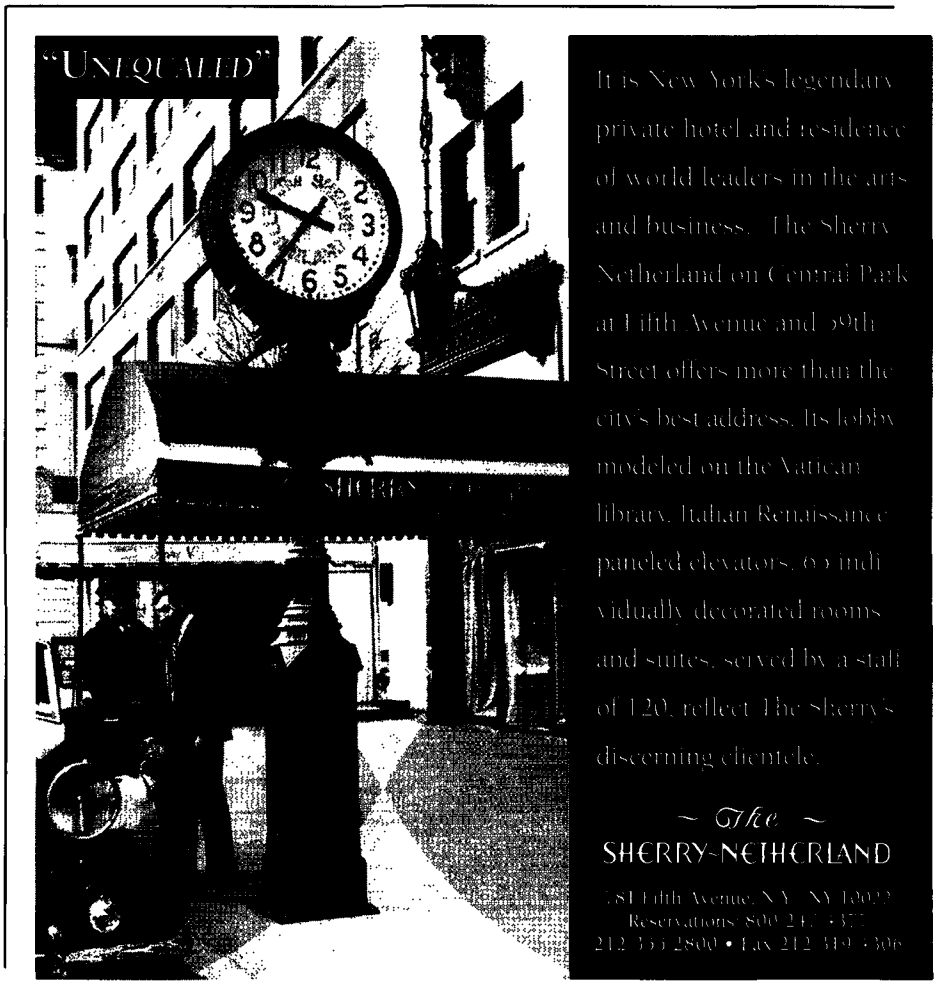
TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's weak and meandering discussion of the moral question involved in abortion is a grave disappointment. COMMENTARY does a disservice to its readership to publish such an illogical, insulting, and in certain significant aspects immoral piece of writing.

Abortion is certainly a moral issue. The choice not to have an abortion subsequent to an unplanned or undesired pregnancy is also a moral issue. To decide to have a child, to become responsible for the physical, emotional, intellectual, and ethical development of a human being, is the weighty responsibility that a woman (and hopefully a man) faces with each birth. It is this knowledge that most women take very seriously. . . . Mr. Wilson's cavalier claims that women decide this as a "matter of taste," "in the same spirit as they decide where to spend their vacation," or that women are only "vaguely aware that another life may be at stake," are at least condescending and at worst display a wanton disrespect for half the human race. His plethora of offensive remarks regarding women's decision-making processes ignores the depth and breadth of a woman's knowledge concerning her responsibilities. There is a culture of motherhood that is generational. I know from my mother and her mother what is involved in developing well-adjusted adults who think, love, act, and respect within moral bounds.

Mr. Wilson's piece reflects his obvious and strong opinion that women are morally deficient, as evidenced by his insistence on legislation to "heighten a woman's moral awareness." He is also certain of his facile solution to the multitude of abortions. Upon seeing a picture of an eight- to ten-week-old fetus, he is "convinced that no woman would agree to an abortion." I think that even most junior-high-school students know what a fetus looks like. Yet he insists that this silly proposal would "induce every woman to make a fully informed moral decision." Does Mr. Wilson propose that these photographs be life-sized for an accurate representation? Does Mr. Wilson realize that at eight weeks the fetus is approximately 1 and 1/8 inches long and weighs 1/30 of an ounce? And, anyway, since when are pictures the basis of morality? Such a cosmetic solution reflects a remarkably shallow sense of values.

It is in Mr. Wilson's general disrespect for women and in his extreme reliance on appearance that I am forcefully struck by his immorality. He states that a horribly deformed fetus "is less human and exercises somewhat less claim on our moral respect" and that he is "forcefully struck by how many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parents will lavish care and affection even on babies born with terrible deformities or incurable illnesses." To him, appearance is even a reflection of our soul. What gibberish. Does a good-looking serial killer from Milwaukee deserve more moral respect than Stephen Hawking of Cambridge University?

We humans have a remarkable ability to think abstractly. In his response to the first group of letters published on his article [Letters from Readers, March], Mr. Wilson clearly refutes this ability: "I do not believe that many people . . . engage in moral reflection." "Let them see it" is not only an insult to our intelligence but to our morality. . . .

LINDA Q. SAX
San Diego, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's efforts to elevate public discourse on moral issues in general in his book, *The Moral Sense*, and in "What Is Moral, and How Do We Know It?" [COMMENTARY, June 1993] are seriously undercut by his flawed methodology, especially as manifested in his article, "On Abortion," and his March response to the letters. Although I also disagree with his conclusions, my focus here is on his methodology. His approach is anti-conceptual, anti-scientific, and avowedly anti-rights. . . .

Mr. Wilson's project is to prove that abortion is immoral in that it kills a "human being." Rather than present any proof that a fetus is an actual human being, he assumes his conclusion throughout by equivocating on the terms "fetus" and "life," using them interchangeably with the terms "infant," "human baby," "human life," and "offspring." Because he has not proven that a fetus is anything more than a *potential* human infant, it is a non sequitur to posit that our respect for human life is sufficient foundation for our respect for a fetus. After all, to crush an acorn is not the same as to fell an oak tree, or even a sapling. Mr. Wilson is simply making an error of categorization, confusing a *potential* human with an *actual* one.

This error is symptomatic of his broader anti-conceptualism, which is characteristic of our culture in general. At root is his failure to define morality or to identify its source in objective reality. For him, morality is the sum of "natural moral sentiments," or transcultural approbation or culturally shared social actions. . . .

If Mr. Wilson were correct that concepts cannot clearly be defined, discourse would be impossible, for we could never be certain of our referents. However, to discuss a topic is to recognize the possibility of clearly definable concepts. Further, he belies his assertion of inherent human uncertainty when he observes, for example, that contraception is morally valid in virtue of our certain knowledge that not all conception results in viable pregnancy, and that at some stage the fetus is less than fully human. Science can indeed discriminate between categories of life.

Although Mr. Wilson declares that we are incapable of certainty as to when the fetus becomes what he terms "a life worthy of moral respect," he recommends that we restrict abortion, and even prohibit it in some cases. He thereby implies that he is willing to employ the force of arms to do so. . . .

As John T. Noonan, Jr. has correctly argued, merely to see and to emote over the pictures of a fetus resembling an infant does not prove that the fetus constitutes a human life which warrants protection from abortion. Mr. Wilson's rejection of the Noonan argument overlooks the persistence of such phenomena as racism and even infanticide—and is consistent with his broader anti-conceptualism. The results of the polls as to how people feel do not constitute scientific principles, however. Junk science is junk, no matter how many people believe it.

Mr. Wilson's solution? Nominalism. Simply denominate a fetus as "human baby," and we will eschew abortion. But so to denominate a fetus no more renders it fully human than Jews and blacks are rendered subhuman by being so denominated. Concepts must be rooted in objective reality, not in emotions.

Mr. Wilson denies that rights have operative relevance to the abortion debate. He divorces rights from morality and claims that while rights are legal issues, morality is a legislative issue. He opposes society's interest in protecting life and morality to the interest of each individual—singly and in unison—of defending individual rights.

Mr. Wilson is unaware that morality, to have meaning, must be rooted in man's nature. A rational morality derives from the fact that man is a mortal being whose survival depends on his autonomous actions, actions governed by his conceptual consciousness and his free will. The fundamental basis of morality is actual human life; and human rights are the rules facilitating social interaction in a manner that protects actual individual human life, including the life of actual infants.

The actual human's basic right is the right to one's own life, centered in the right to govern one's body, and articulated in the rights to "liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness." Respect for human rights is a moral affirmation of the respect due actual human life. Contrary to Mr. Wilson's claims, a woman properly asserts not a right to an abortion, but a right to govern her own body and her own life. Moreover, there are no "women's rights," only *human rights*.

Despite his rejection of the principle of rights in relation to abortion, Mr. Wilson implicitly appeals to the rights of the more mature fetus by his equivocations on the terms "fetus" and "infant," and by his demand that the fetus over ten weeks old be granted the same moral and legal consideration as an actual infant.

Finally, Mr. Wilson's communitarian view that majority opinion should prevail on moral issues denies a fundamental principle of our Constitution: that of protecting the rights of the individual against the majority. His is a legal positivism of the worst sort: the individual has only those rights which the majority deigns to bestow. And the basis for that gift? Unreasoning emotion.

MURRAY I. FRANCK
Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center
Touro College
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his article, James Q. Wilson analyzed the problem of abortion as involving questions of morality rather than questions of rights and suggested that this should make compromise easier. The responses to his article demonstrate that the dichotomy is not acceptable to the partisans of either the rights of women or of the rights of those not yet born. Mr. Wilson recognizes the unwillingness of the former to acknowledge that their

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opponents believe that a fetus "has rights *and* that it is sacred." He, on the other hand, cannot believe that anyone would deny a fetus the status of *human* life until birth. He writes: "Surely [the line] must be drawn before birth, since the fetus is viable many weeks before a normal delivery." But viability may not be the criterion for defining *human* life.

Let me present Mr. Wilson with a hard choice. Assume that a fetus is almost at term. The eager mother has scheduled an induced delivery upon the advice of her physician. A few days before the scheduled induction, the expectant mother reads in the newspaper that a medication she took during pregnancy has been discovered to have consequences that are worse than thalidomide. Having confirmed this with her doctor, she has an abortion on the day when the induction was to have taken place. Is she a murderer? Is her doctor? . . .

The letters appear to indicate that the issue of abortion involves questions of both rights and morality. This does not invalidate the compromises that Mr. Wilson has proposed, and it certainly does not diminish the importance of the civility that he has brought to the debate. But if we are to progress in our search for a solution, we will have to recognize that the saving of *human* lives and the privacy of one's own body both raise questions of rights. But a recognition of the existence of rights does not resolve anything. Most rights are not absolute. . . . Various social concerns have required the sacrifice of rights. Individual property rights may be subordinated to a community interest in preserving landmarks, and one's right to do as one pleases to one's own body is limited by laws prohibiting such things as drug use and suicide.

We need a civil debate about abortion. That debate must reflect an awareness that some people believe a fetus to be human life while others do not, and still others consider the human quality of a fetus to change over time. We should not be troubled that, for many, the belief is one that arises out of religious teachings. Science may teach us whether or not something is alive, but the attribution of *human* to that life involves a value judgment beyond the reach of science. Our religious outlook affects the way we perceive the world and comprehend important events no less legitimately than our economic status, class, or ethnicity. . . .

Mr. Wilson is correct: *Roe* v. *Wade* is a problem. It is a problem because it has removed the issue of abortion from its proper place on the political agenda. It belongs on the legislative table where it can be addressed meaningfully. And preferably, it belongs on the tables of the state legislatures so that the resolution of the moral questions will reflect the moral values of the communities for which varying compromises would be reached. Then we would be able to test our compromises against those that have been forged in neighboring communities and perhaps go on to do better.

JEROME LEFKOWITZ
Albany, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

My only objection to James Q. Wilson's article has to do with what he obviously thinks is a minor part of the general problem, i.e., infanticide. He claims that no philosopher favors both abortion and infanticide. This is true because until recently abortion was a rare and dangerous operation. A good many philosophers have favored infanticide for defective children. Aristotle is an example. Indeed, Mr. Wilson remarks that infanticide was very common in much of the world until recently.

The point of this letter is that infanticide is still practiced in the United States; in fact, it is reasonably common. Defective children in many hospitals are subject to treatment which leads to their death. They are not fed or they are put in a cold atmosphere where they will get pneumonia. This is normally done with the consent, even advocacy, of the parents. . . .

Perhaps because of my earlier indoctrination in Chinese culture, I have no particular objection to infanticide for defective children. The painful method in which it is normally carried out, however, seems to me to be very undesirable. I should say in passing that late abortions sometimes produce a fetus which remains alive and apparently in pain for a period of hours after it is removed. Here again, no effort is made to kill it painlessly.

I suspect the reason here is that the doctors are following the practice of bad King John. He thought that killing his enemies was wicked and simply put them in a dungeon and refrained from feeding them.

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He thought this absolved him from the guilt of killing. I suspect a good many doctors feel this way, but personally I regard this as a cruel practice.

GORDON TULLOCK
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson makes a strong argument that abortion is not well understood in a "rights" framework. His argument is strengthened when we realize that supporters of abortion, who phrase their arguments in rights terms, suffer from a fundamental inconsistency in their position. The argument for choice is that a woman should have the right to use her body in whatever way she wants, and that the state does not have the moral right to compel her to provide shelter to a fetus. The reason this argument seems odd is that the state routinely regulates the way in which we (men and women) use our bodies and few persons protest.

Moreover, the state regulates the way in which we use our bodies in situations where there is no argument that anyone else is affected. . . . Abortion has implications for the woman, the fetus (and perhaps the father), . . . yet only abortion regulation is attacked as violating free choice.

The regulatory body that most interferes with the way in which we use our individual bodies in cases where there is no effect on anyone (or anything) else is the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). For example, this agency has recently prohibited women from purchasing breast implants except for restorative surgery. . . . But this is only one example of FDA regulation. . . . Indeed, the entire FDA is in the business of limiting freedom of choice. No one is free to purchase drugs that the FDA has not approved. For drugs that have been approved, one cannot choose to purchase them unless a physician is hired to write a prescription. . . .

While the FDA is the most egregious violator of freedom of choice, government routinely engages in similar violations. Minimum-wage laws mean that one cannot choose to sell one's labor for the going price if this price is less than some arbitrary government floor. Occupational-licensing laws mean that a consumer cannot choose to hire an unlicensed practitioner. . . .

It is not surprising, however, that supporters of easier abortion do not use their strongest arguments. Many supporters of "freedom of choice" for abortion are generally also in favor of increased government regulation in the economy. Many women's-rights advocates, for example, support "comparable worth," a set of regulations denying women the choice of selling their labor for the going market wage. The American Civil Liberties Union, a supporter of liberalized abortion laws, disdains any support for economic liberties. Laurence Tribe of Harvard, the author of a major pro-abortion book, is otherwise a staunch advocate of government power. . . .

If those supporting liberal abortion rules were willing to support reduced regulation in general, their case would be logically more powerful and they could ally themselves with other supporters of social and economic freedom.

PAUL H. RUBIN
Atlanta, Georgia

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson focuses on the moral dimension of the abortion question, about which he is extremely persuasive, but he ignores history. In 1850 B.C.E. the Egyptians, and then later the Greeks and Romans, left records of abortion and contraception. . . . The Greeks and Romans, like us, commonly practiced abortion while often censuring it. . . .

Mr. Wilson also asks what kind of people are we that cannot say legislatively that human life is precious. We do. Imprisonment or execution follows the taking of a precious life. Significantly, we are unable to impose a sentence on an expectant mother who aborts.

What remains is what Mr. Wilson believes: that there is no possibility of a consensus among pro- and anti-abortion activists. This lack of consensus will continue indefinitely no matter how the issue is defined, either as a question of "rights" or "morals," and so will the rhetoric.

HERBERT CHARLES
Tiburon, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . James Q. Wilson's approach to abortion is refreshingly respectful of women, in stark contrast to current practices which carefully shield women from reality behind vague language and the banner of women's rights.

It seems to me, however, that Mr. Wilson's approach, if superimposed on the education we now give adolescents and teenagers, could be unspeakably cruel. After all, our schools' health-and-values classes are exquisitely careful to avoid discussing the fetus when discussing abortion, except to imply that a first-trimester fetus is more or less indiscriminate—even invasive—tissue. Are we to wait until a pregnant teen seeks an abortion before letting her know, for example, that her fetus had a heartbeat already two weeks after she first missed her period? Shouldn't we be teaching the "facts of life" *before* pregnancy?

Arguably we should also no longer shrink from sharing information about how a pregnancy actually is "terminated." For what other medical procedure do we encourage silence rather than require at least some explanation of the surgical procedures to be employed? It seems to me that an informed moral decision whether to proceed with an abortion would necessarily require some understanding of what an abortion, medically speaking, actually entails. Let us stop patronizing women and start giving them some facts. True pro-choice advocates should not be afraid of informed choice.

SUSAN GEIGER TSCHIRHART
Westport, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

There is a very simple mistake that underlies James Q. Wilson's whole attempt to determine at what point and to what extent unborn humans merit our respect. That mistake is to imagine that the evil done in killing a being depends only on what that being is at the very moment it is killed. But what is even a newborn baby? It has few, if any, of the capacities that we recognize as distinctively human, such as the power of reason and abstract thought, the power of moral decision, the ability to think ahead and to plan, or articulate speech. It sucks, defecates, cries, and sleeps. If we were to evaluate its moral worth on the basis of its present state, we should have to place it much lower than a dog, which, after all, is capable of loyalty, self-sacrifice, problem-solving, understanding spoken words,

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and much other complicated behavior. In fact, we should have to assign even a lower value to a comatose, or, for that matter, a sleeping man.

What is "taken" when we "take a life"? Not the victim's past, surely, for that is over and done with. And the present is but an instant. It is clear that the victim is being deprived of his future. That being so, the killing of a younger person, however immature, undeveloped, and unimpressive at the time he is killed, is a greater act of destruction than killing an older person. . . .

Some will say that if this is so, and a fetus is to be respected as a future or "potential" man, then equal or nearly equal respect must be accorded sperm and egg as future or potential fetuses, so that contraception would be homicide. Some even ignorantly imagine this to be the basis of the Catholic Church's condemnation of contraception—a confusion not helped by Mr. Wilson's muddled discussion of the issue.

Indeed, a sperm and egg could be thought of (together) as a potential human being. But not all potentialities are equal. A $100 bill is a potential toaster or television set or other useful item. If it were not, it would be merely a piece of green paper. Similarly, a check made out to me for $100 and properly signed is a potential $100 bill. I would suffer as much loss in tearing up the bill or the check as in smashing the goods purchased with them. But who would be so fatuous as to argue that in tearing up a blank check I would be suffering any great loss, though it had the "potential" to be signed and to be made out for a large sum?

The sole surviving score of a great symphony has the potential to be converted into beautiful music. To destroy the score is to destroy the music. But a blank piece of paper, just because someone may write a symphony upon it, has nowhere near the same value. There are different degrees of potentiality and they confer different value.

The sperm or egg, like the blank check or the blank paper, can have many fates, can become many things or nothing depending on chance and circumstance. They are indeterminate.

There is a connection between the contraceptive mentality and abortion, no doubt. But the Catholic Church condemns contraception as a sexual sin which strips the marital act of intercourse of its full meaning while it condemns abortion as homicide. This position does not logically entail, as flippantly asserted by Mr. Wilson, that killing a sperm is homicide.

Mr. Wilson brands as "unscientific" the view that something of fundamental biological and, therefore, moral significance happens when sperm and egg are united, while attributing much greater significance to developments that occur at eight weeks. I am only a theoretical physicist and not a sociologist, but I fail to see what is unscientific about something so obvious as that conception is the inauguration of human life. At conception the blueprint is formed for a genetically distinct human being (or beings). Nothing whatever has to be added to the fetus to make a human being out of it. It is simply a human being in an early stage. It is possible that the immortal soul is infused at some later point, but the question of this "animation" that concerned St. Thomas and others is a matter of pure speculation and clearly not a scientific question at all. All that science can tell us and does tell us is that the life of the organism begins at conception.

According to theology, what sets the human soul apart from the souls of animals is that it is "rational." We have reason and free will, and in those respects are made in God's image. Can Mr. Wilson tell us what experiments have established that at 40 or 80 days or 8 weeks after conception a fetus has reason or free will, or has them even 40 days after birth?

STEPHEN M. BARR
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . James Q. Wilson rightly insists that the nature of the abortion debate should be one of morality rather than one of civil rights. But immediately, once we cast the debate in a moral context, its horizons necessarily expand far beyond relatively abstract questions like "When does life begin?" The debate, for Mr. Wilson and many others, centers around this classic question and the implications for public policy of whatever conclusion is reached. Mr. Wilson struggles with the question at some length, expending considerable energy, for instance, on "the moment of conception" (which he doubts exists), historical conjectures on the point at which the fetus receives its soul, and comparative sensitivity to sight and feeling.

But the formation of public policy on abortion, from a moral standpoint, cannot be pursued merely on the basis of abstract intellectual premises or judgments. For the question is an intensely personal one. The parties to most of the public conversation on abortion appear to ignore the most basic question of all: when did *my* life begin? At what point would it have been okay to "terminate" *my* fetus?

I would submit that any writer or public policy-maker, however learned, who cannot answer this question has no business attempting to settle it for anybody else.

My mother was thirty-eight when I was born, and was not really planning a seventh child. Being a devoted Christian woman, however, she accepted her pregnancy, together with the attendant responsibility. Had abortion not been illegal in 1927, and had it not been for her faith, there would be a considerable likelihood of my nonexistence. . . . But I was born, and there is no way I can say with assurance or precision when my life began. Mr. Wilson's essay, for all its brilliance, is only minimally helpful. But I concur fully in his conclusion: human life is precious. . . .

Viewed from a purely personal standpoint, the practice of abortion is always wrong. If every fetus were killed, the human race would quickly become extinct. Is the easy availability of abortion, along with the concomitant rise of violence and corruption, symptomatic of a subconsciously pervasive death wish in our secularized culture?

I believe it is.

The wholesale legalization of abortion makes sense only from a nihilistic viewpoint. . . . If a newly conceived human life has value only if it is convenient to or wanted by its own progenitors, what does that say about my life or yours?

It was John Donne who wrote, "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

DONALD MCBRIDE
Churubusco, Indiana

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson argues that our moral intuitions do not support the fact that life begins at conception. Instead, he argues, our pro-life intuitions kick in only after the unborn child starts to look like one of us. His arguments are faulty.

Mr. Wilson asserts that a life-at-conception standard implies an opposition to contraception, which he considers absurd. However, while such a standard would consistently oppose abortifacients, it would not oppose any attempts to prevent conception in the first place, e.g., through condoms, spermicides, sterilization, or periodic abstinence.

He claims that the high mortality of fertilized eggs makes any attempt to prevent their abortion futile. We can only have moral respect for unborn children with "great expectations" for survival. However, in certain parts of the world infants have a much slimmer chance of reaching their first birthday than zygotes have of being born. Would Mr. Wilson's moral sentiments then permit infanticide? . . .

Mr. Wilson's solution to the abortion debate is to try to persuade pregnant women of the moral seriousness of abortion, not to ban it outright. But this is hypocritical. If abortion is *really* morally serious, and leads to the death of an innocent human being, then abortion should be illegal. No other immoral act, which directly kills an innocent human being, is legal. What Mr. Wilson is suggesting is that the government try to convince pregnant women of a moral principle that the government itself does not take seriously. It is precisely these kinds of policies that undermine the legitimacy of government, and if such policies are implemented in the name of the pro-life cause, so too will its credibility be damaged.

Moral hypocrisy is not the answer to immorality. Mr. Wilson suggests a law that sanctions barbarism, while making high-minded proclamations about the importance of acting civilly. The proper answer to immoral acts that kill innocent human beings is simply to prohibit them, no matter how upsetting this may be to those who have psychological, political, and financial interests in continued killing. Civilization demands no less of us.

DAVID RASMUSSEN
Phoenix, Arizona

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The Arab Boycott of Israel

Does it give any clues to Arab intentions?

In the current peace negotiations between the Arab states and Israel there is much pressure on Israel to make "accommodations for peace." No such gestures are ever being requested from the Arabs. One very important matter, the Arab boycott of Israel, is never even being discussed.

What are the facts?

The Background of the Boycott. The Arab states try to make the world believe that their hostility toward Israel is based on Israel's "occupation" of "Arab lands", which came under Israeli administration as a result of the 1967 Six-Day War. But the Arab boycott of Israel goes back even further—to 1946, two years before the state of Israel even existed.

How the Boycott works. The boycott works on several levels. The *primary boycott* prohibits Arab people and Arab states to do any business—with and in Israel. The *secondary boycott* attempts to prevent businesses anywhere in the world from any economic activity with Israel and threatening them with economic retaliation if they do not conform. It is a very potent weapon, since most countries and most businesses are well aware that the large Arab market and its enormous oil wealth make it most unattractive to get into the bad graces of the Arabs. Little consideration is given to the fact that the boycott is a gross violation of international law. The U.S. is the one shining exception to the almost universal acceptance of this economic blackmail. There is also the *tertiary boycott* that punishes firms that deal with blacklisted businesses. And perhaps the most damaging aspect is the so-called "*voluntary boycott*", by which companies, and in some cases entire countries, refrain pre-emptively from doing business with Israel in order to avoid retaliation by the Arabs.

The boycott also applies to international shipping, aviation and tourism: Most ships and airplanes calling on Israel are barred from Arab ports; airplanes enroute to and from Israel cannot overfly Arab countries. Israelis or any travelers with Israeli visas in their passports may not enter most Arab countries.

The Arab Boycott Office maintains a blacklist, which at last count included over 6,300 entries in 96 countries. In the United States alone, over 12,000 firms each year receive requests from Arab firms for boycott compliance. In Europe and Asia, where, in contrast to the United States, boycott compliance is usually legal, the numbers are probably much higher.

> "The Arab boycott is undisguised economic warfare against the state of Israel. It is totally unrelated to any territorial dispute the Arabs may have with Israel."

The Cost of the Boycott to Israel. The primary damage of the boycott to the Israeli economy is that it prevents or considerably hampers investments in the country. That loss is estimated to be on the order of $500 to $600 million per year. The loss of potential trade with the Arab countries alone is on the order of over $500 million per year. Because of the boycott, Israel's commercial exports are at least 10% less than they would otherwise be—a loss of about $1.2 billion per year!

The Arab boycott is undisguised economic warfare against Israel. The boycott is totally unrelated to any territorial dispute the Arabs may have with Israel, since the boycott started over twenty years before any such territories came under Israeli administration. Its purpose is the strangulation of Israel—to achieve by economic means what the Arabs, despite many tries, have been unable to achieve by military means. But the greatest losers of the boycott may well be the Arabs themselves. Blinded by their hatred of Israel they have prevented the Middle East from becoming an area of growth and prosperity exceeding even the Asian Pacific Rim countries. Rescinding the almost 50-year old boycott would be an encouraging signal to the world and to the Israeli public. Their not bringing even such a gesture does give a clue that the intentions of the Arabs are not peaceful and that Israel is justified in proceeding with greatest caution in any peace negotiations.

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's article and his response to the letters illustrate a number of logical inconsistencies which occur repeatedly in articles about abortion.

Mr. Wilson says that to maintain the immorality of contraception would require the Roman Catholic Church to ban IUD's and some birth-control pills which prevent the implantation of the fertilized egg in the wall of the uterus. This seems to be a key point in his argument, yet contraception is that which prevents conception, and conception takes place at the time the sperm fertilizes the egg. Therefore, IUD's and the forms of birth control he mentions are not contraceptives at all. . . .

Mr. Wilson's attempt to find a time in the development of the fetus when we can invest it with humanhood is reminiscent of the Supreme Court's argument in *Roe* v. *Wade*. The argument is doomed because it is specious. The truth is that if we had to wait to invest a child with personhood until it was no longer dependent on us, we would have to wait for some time after birth. Who would argue that one-day- (week-, month-, year-, etc.) old babies should not be protected because they are unable to care for themselves, or have not yet developed a "human personality"?

The argument . . . that society has no right to interfere because the preborn child is part of the mother's body is the most mischievous of all pro-abortion arguments. . . .

The baby is inside the mother and totally dependent on the mother, but not part of the mother. Can you think of any other part of a human that, when removed, can continue to live a life of its own? I am convinced that abortion supporters really understand this. The problem is that they see the obligation of the mother to nurture and protect the dependent, preborn child as a burden. When the mother rejects the responsibility for the child she has conceived, this is a problem of the mother, not of the innocent, helpless child. At this point, if the baby does not receive interference from some outside source, it cannot survive.

We recognize this principle after the child has been born. When the parent abuses the child, the state claims the right to interfere and supersede the rights of the parent . . . because the helpless child has been betrayed by the ones on whom he is dependent.

Our society expresses great concern for the helpless child postpartum, but is blind to its needs before that magical date.

GARY MITCHELL
Eaton Rapids, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I was heartened to see James Q. Wilson's reflections on abortion. He is one of the few serious moral thinkers left in America, and his entry into the debate will surely raise the level of argument on all sides. I have two modest comments to add.

First, I question the wisdom of attacking abortion while accepting contraception. Mr. Wilson is a thorough researcher; I hope he will comment on the ample evidence that relaxing traditional social and moral strictures on contraception leads to an increase—not a decrease—in the incidence of abortion.

Second, the pre-abortion counseling advocated by Mr. Wilson might be more effective if it included the use of a fetal monitor to register and amplify the heartbeat of the unborn child. Medical texts say the heart starts to beat within four weeks of conception. I wonder how many pregnancies would be aborted if prospective mothers had to listen for a minute to the steady heartbeat of the life inside them.

MICHAEL WARNER
Wheaton, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It was refreshing to read James Q. Wilson's sensible and constructive thoughts on abortion. Several other nations that protect a woman's right to choose try to make that choice as fully informed as possible by assuring that women are aware not only of the facts about fetal development, but of assistance available to women who continue their pregnancies. Why would anyone who respects women's capacity for moral judgment object to such information?

Unlike many other commentators on this vexed issue, Mr. Wilson is in no rush to prescribe legislation. That is as it should be. The fact is that state and federal legislators suffer from an information deficit, too. In their case, the problem is that little is known about the efficacy or indirect effects of the many possible combinations of approaches to the abortion problem. The best way to gain such information, as Louis Brandeis pointed out long ago, is to permit the states to experiment. But the Supreme Court slammed the door on that process in 1973. If the states had been left free to continue with the modernization of abortion law that was just then beginning, some by now might have matched Sweden's achievement of cutting both abortion and teenage-pregnancy rates in half in the space of a single decade.

As the matter now stands, the adoption of Mr. Wilson's modest suggestion that women seeking abortion be shown photographs of developing human life might have disappointing effects. The bitter harvest of the Supreme Court's elaboration of the abortion license from *Roe* to *Casey* may be a generation of men and women whose hearts are hardened against the most vulnerable members of the human community. In 1973, when the Court put even late-term fetuses beyond the pale of state protection if the mother's "well-being" was at stake, predictions that other burdensome individuals would come to seem disposable were widely dismissed as fantastic. Yet in the space of two decades, the abortion issue has been eclipsed by "voluntary" and involuntary euthanasia.

The American version of the culture of death was not announced by the thunder of jackboots; its vanguard has glided in on rubber soles. There is no crude talk of "life unworthy to live." "Compassion" is the order of the day—for those unfortunate children who would be born into poverty, for the mentally or physically disabled, for the terminally ill. Individual choice shades gently into pressuring the burdensome to choose death for themselves, or into making choices for others. "They wouldn't have wanted to live," we are soothingly assured.

Among the many values at stake in the abortion issue, as Mr. Wilson recognizes, is the social interest in "maintaining a moral environment in which decisions about life and death are taken seriously and treated as matters of moral gravity." The question is: has that environment already suffered irreversible damage?

MARY ANN GLENDON
Harvard Law School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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JAMES Q. WILSON writes:

Abortion is an issue that raises such powerful and opposed passions and is decided on the basis of so many conflicting sentiments that no one should be surprised to discover that hardly anyone changes his or her mind after reading an essay on the matter. If I had any illusions that my modest contribution to this debate would produce any agreement, 32 letters published by this magazine have brought me back to reality.

I now worry that the emotions the issue arouses prevent many people from reading carefully what I have written. How can Linda Q. Sax think I believe that most women make their decision about abortion "as a matter of taste" when I said exactly the opposite? I wrote that while "there may be some extreme pro-choice activists" who think such a decision is "purely a matter of taste," I doubt that many women approach the matter this way. Far from me demeaning "half the human race," she demeans an author by allowing her anger to cloud her eyesight. (By contrast, Susan Geiger Tschirhart thanks me for being "refreshingly respectful of women.") How can Murray I. Franck think that I am "unaware that morality, to have meaning, must be rooted in man's nature" when the entire essay (and my book, *The Moral Sense*) is precisely an effort to derive morality from close attention to human nature?

Most of the current letters are more discerning than these, but they do not advance the argument. Henry Sherman remains resolute in his commitment to the "innate right" of a woman to decide, without any guidance, whether to bring another life into a world of limited resources and urban decay. But why stop with the fetus, Mr. Sherman? If human life is a matter of personal choice based on cost-benefit calculations, why not give to the mother the "innate right" to decide whether her one-month-old or one-year-old child shall be killed? And if you say, "Well that's different," *why* is it different? Perhaps Mr. Sherman should engage Gordon Tullock on this matter, since the latter seems prepared to accept infanticide.

I am not surprised that Stephen M. Barr, Donald McBride, and David Rasmussen are uncomfortable with my view on when a morally significant human life begins. I am not entirely comfortable with it, either. I believe that many women view abortion as wrong beginning at the moment of conception. But many others do not think that it is wrong. How are we to expand the extent to which women contemplating abortion confront the moral issues? I have made a suggestion; they reject it in favor, I presume, of a strict legal ban on all abortions. With a shrinking handful of exceptions, their view has not prevailed in any nation in the world and cannot be made to prevail here. What do they propose to do about that fact, other than rail against modernity?

What I propose is what Mary Ann Glendon has so eloquently argued for in her letter, which I shall treasure always. Most of us want, and all of us ought to want, to maintain a "moral environment in which decisions about life and death are taken seriously and treated as matters of moral gravity." *The United States, almost alone among the nations of the world, makes it virtually impossible to do this.* How can we defend so extreme a policy? That rights are trumps? But we are not playing a bridge game here, we are debating human life. The rights-only activists want us to believe that the practical effect of their position is all for the best—we will avoid having children "born into poverty." Like Mary Ann Glendon, I fear the implications of these soothing words, implications already discernible in polite discussions about euthanasia. ("We don't want old people living in a world of terminal disease.")

Reestablishing abortion as a moral issue in which society has an interest cannot be done, I think, by repeating the well-known and (up to a point) important arguments about life beginning at conception. Those arguments will not persuade a majority, not because the majority is morally bankrupt but because most people acknowledge the existence of competing principles that they cannot easily resolve by imagining a four-cell zygote. Matters might become a bit different if people were asked to see, not imagine, something that is indisputably human, namely, an eight-week-old fetus.

Health-Care Reform

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his generally inaccurate and exaggerated article, "What Health Care Crisis?" [February], Irwin M. Stelzer takes a series of statements from an article of mine in *Domestic Affairs* and uses them to mislead your readers.

My question was whether any possible differences in services justify the much higher costs of medical care in America than in other countries. The answer is no. That does not mean the United States should want to spend as little as even the most expensive other country, Canada. In the article, I discuss which differences in cost are clearly unnecessary (such as the overhead associated with our risk-rating insurance system, or some of the "excess" capacity of high-tech equipment); which we might choose to reduce slightly (much higher incomes for our providers); and which we might choose to retain (some amenities and extra capacity).

Mr. Stelzer then selects from my article and misapplies what I actually said. According to Mr. Stelzer:

> Joseph White . . . concedes that "Britain has restricted capacity severely and makes people wait much longer for services that Americans would consider necessary, than we would accept."

Yes, Britain has restricted capacity severely and created long waiting lists. I would spend more money, but he gives the impression that our level of spending is necessary to eliminate waiting lists. That is absurd. The British spend less than half of what we do as a share of their economy; they could double their hospital spending and still be nowhere close to our level of costs.

Mr. Stelzer then implies that I cite the "British rule that patients over fifty-five are not eligible for kidney dialysis." The British are much more conservative about dialysis, and should do more, but there is no such rule. Further, dialysis is the last example any American should cite as an evil of "socialized medicine." A competent analyst would realize that treatment for end-stage renal disease in the U.S. is a federal entitlement. Dialysis in America is "socialized" because our private insurers would try to exclude any potential customer who needed it.

Next, Mr. Stelzer reports that "Australia faces both availability restrictions and 'spiraling costs.'" I cannot tell if he is deliberately misrepresenting what I wrote or if

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he does not understand insurance. My sentence reads:

> Australia has reached a point where restrictions in its national system, while not nearly as severe as those in Britain, are serious enough to keep private insurance and hospitals in business, despite adverse selection that creates spiraling costs.

In Australia the government guarantees care, but people can also use private insurance and hospitals. "Adverse selection" is a term that is used to describe a situation in which people who are especially likely to incur costs choose to insure. Adverse selection to a national system is impossible, since everybody is automatically a member. Australia has spiraling costs in its *private, voluntary* insurance system because most people figure the government system is fine, but people who need an elective operation soon are more likely to buy private coverage. Australia does not have spiraling costs in its public system, or overall. And one can argue that in essence its system guarantees basic care to everyone but enables people to pay extra, especially for more choice of physicians—as opposed to the U.S., where people pay extra for more choice, but there is no basic guarantee of care.

Mr. Stelzer cites me accurately as to "stirrings of dissatisfaction" in France, which means that there is not enough of a problem for anybody to have defined it as a serious issue (and French doctors are not shy about protesting).

On Canada he actually raises a substantive point, but couches it in tendentious blather. In a few well-publicized cases, the growth of demand for care in Canada has outstripped supply—particularly in the case of cardiac surgery. He is right that shortages caused by planning are often unintentional. But that is not because "planners" have "preferential access." Canadian "planners" are not "Kremlin bureaucrats" who do not have to "queue," as Mr. Stelzer claims. He has no evidence at all for that slur.

Mr. Stelzer says: "Canada's recent response to unbearable cost increases—a reduction in the services covered—passes without mention in White's analysis." Wrong again. First, there has been very, very little "reduction in the services covered." Second, the "unbearable" cost increases have been much, much lower than the increases in the United States—which Mr. Stelzer claims has no cost crisis! Third, a sentence that he *quotes* begins, "That does not mean in the future." Fourth, all my comparisons are explicitly to 1991 data. Fifth, I *state* that Canada had more difficulty restraining costs than other systems (except compared to the U.S.!) in the 1980's and that "suggests any set of institutions can limit health-care costs only to a certain extent." As for Patricia Danzon's analysis, Mr. Stelzer fails to note that Canadians go to the doctor more often than Americans, hospital stays are longer, hospitalization rates are higher—in short, by many measures, Canadians get more services.

Then there are Japan and Germany. Mr. Stelzer is right that the Japanese may be more stoically accepting of waits (though try telling that to subway riders). In fact, there is not much waiting for surgery in Japan because not much surgery is prescribed. As with the British, the Japanese spend so much less than America that comparisons of service for spending are essentially absurd; nobody could imagine that we are buying enough extra to explain the difference. And, as in the British case, I state explicitly that we would not want to spend so little.

But then Mr. Stelzer goes on to Germany, and in a paragraph that is based on my article, he reports that Germany "achieves low costs by limiting malpractice suits. . . ." Which I never said. Yes, the Germans have price controls and buy less high-tech equipment. And costs grew relative to income during the recession after reunification (adopting a whole country gets expensive). But the fact is that German costs as a proportion of GDP *went down* during the 1980's! They remain much, much lower than in the U.S. And if Mr. Stelzer has evidence for his claims that the Germans save money by letting the terminally ill die, I would rather he cite it (so I could see it) than imply that he learned it from my work.

In short, Mr. Stelzer has either intentionally distorted or misunderstood every single point a reader might believe he took from my work. He takes any statement of a possible problem, however limited and however much it might be (over) balanced by good points, and exaggerates it. . . .

There are many facts, and if selected out of context they can be used to deceive people. But the basic pattern is very clear. The U.S. spends much more for health care than any other country in the world. Many Americans, unlike in other advanced industrial countries, do without treatment because they do not have insurance. American health-care costs have grown much faster than those of every other country during the past decade. That is one reason a larger proportion of individuals and businesses cannot pay for insurance. The only possible argument for superior American quality is easier access to elective surgery if you are insured. But America has *lower* average quality in many other ways (such as access to immunizations and prenatal care). Up until 1971, when adoption of the Canadian health system was complete, U.S. and Canadian costs and health-care statistics tracked each other closely. Since then, health-care costs as a share of the economy have grown twice as quickly in the U.S., with no positive difference in outcomes. . . .

JOSEPH WHITE
The Brookings Institution
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . It is not my intention to debate the semantic question of whether the problems in American health care are serious enough to constitute a "crisis" (although it is worth noting that in a recent Gallup/CNN/*USA Today* survey more than eight in ten Americans thought they were). Rather, I wish to identify and challenge several misleading statements Irwin M. Stelzer makes about the current state of our health-care system.

Mr. Stelzer claims that the current sense of crisis is in part a reflection of "the well-documented liberal bias of the major media." My research indicates otherwise. If Mr. Stelzer were correct, we would expect to see public dissatisfaction with the health-care system rise only after the media began to focus on the issue. In fact, the data support the opposite conclusion. In October 1987, for example, a full 72 percent of Americans felt the health-care system needed to be fundamentally changed or completely rebuilt. That same year, not one story on health-care reform or national health insurance appeared in three of the most widely read national newspapers—the

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Christian Science Monitor, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. It was not until 1991—the year Harris Wofford won Pennsylvania's special Senate race after campaigning on a platform that included national health insurance—that media coverage of health reform began to take off. In short, the evidence simply does not support Mr. Stelzer's argument. To the contrary, it indicates that the press was reacting to, not driving, public opinion and political events.

Mr. Stelzer also invokes media bias to explain what he calls "one of the great anomalies in the health-care debate," the fact that Americans are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the health-care system, but satisfied with their own health care. Yet this "anomaly" can be explained more easily. The public is not anxious about the care it gets, but about the adequacy and security of its health-insurance coverage. Americans worry that they or one of their family members or friends will be unprotected from a major medical expense. According to the U.S. Census, in a two-year period one out of every four Americans lose their health-insurance coverage. Roughly half of employed Americans have had their health benefits cut during the last two years, and one in five households is home to someone who has been denied coverage for health insurance because of a pre-existing condition. There is no need to search for a media conspiracy to explain why these widely recognized problems foster public discontent with our health-care system.

Mr. Stelzer also dismisses widespread concern over high and rising national health expenditures, arguing that America, as "the richest nation in the world," should be expected to spend more on health care. But he misses the point. We not only spend more on health than other nations, as one might expect, but we also spend a much higher percentage of our national income. Thus, the United States . . . spends more per person relative to its per-capita GDP than any other nation.

I agree with Mr. Stelzer that these figures do not account for differences in quality. But what does the evidence show? America has performed poorly by international standards on such basic (and admittedly crude) health indicators as infant mortality and life expectancy. Mr. Stelzer may be right to argue that our poor performance reflects the distinctive character of American society—our abundant supply of "crack babies," "bullet-ridden drug pushers," "members of urban gangs," and "black women" who are disinclined to "avail themselves of prenatal care"—but he provides no evidence, save a *New York Times* article, to support this claim. What is known with some certainty is that the percentage of health spending that goes to administrative costs is higher in the U.S. than in other industrialized democracies. We also know that a significant percentage of care delivered in the United States is either unnecessary or inappropriate, and that there is substantial, unexplained regional variation in the use of procedures. And we know that more people are uninsured in America than in any other OECD country. Mr. Stelzer chooses to ignore all these facts.

And what of Mr. Stelzer's claim that societal expectations are to blame for our high health spending? It is flattering to think that Americans are more demanding than the citizens of other countries. But is this true? Americans contact their physicians less frequently than the citizens of either Canada, Germany, or Japan, and they spend fewer days in the hospital. While Americans may demand more technologically intensive care than citizens of other nations, it would be a mistake to assume, as Mr. Stelzer does, that this is a "basic American value." It is doctors, not patients, who make the lion's share of treatment decisions, especially the most costly. And physicians' styles of medical practice are shaped at least as much by the structure of our health-care system, with its open-ended, third-party reimbursements, as they are by the demands of patients. To be sure, Americans would not accept the explicit rationing that takes place in Britain. But Britain spends about one-third of what the U.S. spends on a per-capita basis. . . .

Mr. Stelzer is to be commended for taking a hard-headed look at the arguments made by those who wish to reform our health-care system fundamentally. But the inad-

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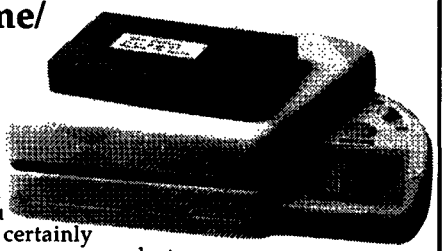

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equacy of his response is clear testimony to the severity of the problem.

JACOB S. HACKER
Harvard School of Public Health
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his article, Irwin M. Stelzer states: "Lost in all this [debate] has been the large question of whether a massive transformation of our health-care system is necessary." Mr. Stelzer bases this opinion, at least in part, on the belief that most of the 37 million people who lack health-insurance coverage at a point in time will remain uninsured for a short time, and cites research conducted by Katherine Swartz and myself on the length of uninsured spells. He then concludes that "the chronically uninsured group in our society numbers closer to 5.5 million than 37 million people."

Unfortunately, these conclusions about the uninsured are based on a misinterpretation of our research.

In fact, the number of chronically uninsured is much larger. I have recently completed more research on this topic which shows that 54 percent of the uninsured at any point in time will remain uninsured for more than two years and 75 percent will be uninsured for more than a year. This implies that of the 37 million uninsured at any one time, between 20 and 28 million persons are "chronically uninsured," a number much larger than the 5.5 million Mr. Stelzer cites.

The confusion here relates to the difference between stocks and flows. At any point in time, a simple head count of those who are without health insurance constitutes the "stock" of uninsured (e.g., the 37-39 million uninsured at a point in time). However, each month there is a "flow" of people into and out of the uninsured category. It is well known that for any duration variable such as the duration of "uninsurance," the stock will contain many more people with long spells than will the flow of people into and out of uninsurance. But Mr. Stelzer cites research about the flow of new uninsured spells and applies these percentages to the stock of uninsured at a point in time.

Mr. Stelzer also minimizes the uninsured problem by claiming that most of the rest of the uninsured are uninsured by choice, i.e., that they are either rich or young. But this conclusion is not supported by data. A large portion of the uninsured (63 percent) will remain uninsured for more than one year and are not between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. Forty-three percent of the uninsured at a point in time will remain uninsured for more than one year and have incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line.

A careful examination of the data on the uninsured suggests that the problem cannot be minimized. Thus, any comprehensive health-care reform proposal must deal with the large segment of our population that cannot obtain health insurance.

TIMOTHY D. MCBRIDE
University of Missouri-St. Louis
St. Louis, Missouri

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Ever since I received my first M.A., I have been teaching English part-time at two to three colleges and community colleges while receiving a second M.A. and applying incessantly for full-time positions. . . . I have had two M.A.'s for a year now, and the job prospects continue to look bleak. I work hard, I am highly respected by colleagues and students, and, though working more than a full-time load, including summers, I barely make ends meet. Thus, I cut corners where I can, one of these corners for the past five years being health insurance.

Close to half the community-college English courses in California are taught by part-timers; the percentage is not much lower in other disciplines or in other parts of the country. Of the twenty or so pepole who got M.A.'s in my English-teaching program last year, none has a full-time job and most probably won't get jobs for years.

I present all this simply to dispel Irwin M. Stelzer's notion that most of us without insurance are students awaiting jobs that are right around the corner, or folks temporarily between jobs. I represent only one field among, I imagine, a multitude that teems with overworked part-timers who are not receiving health benefits. . . .

The American health-care system *is* great, but that does not mean it cannot be better.

SETH MENDELOWITZ
Oakland, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . However Irwin M. Stelzer analyzes the situation, there are facts of clinical life "on the ground" that I, a psychiatrist in private practice in Massachusetts, have to live with on a daily basis.

The past two years have seen the proliferation of managed-care companies in mental health whose purposes are to contain the cost and scope of services by controlling the delivery of care. This proliferation is being driven by the perception of large employers and insurance companies that mental-health costs have run out of control and need to be contained. Even if Mr. Stelzer's statistics disprove the existence of a crisis, employers think there is one, and are acting accordingly.

Every health-care consultant I have spoken to asserts that these trends in mental health are the leading edge for all medicine. I have heard of managed-care companies that have been formed for oncology and for obstetrics/gynecology. Can cardiology be far behind? . . .

Mega-medicine is coming. Its advent is being driven by economic exigencies perceived by those who are paying the costs (employers, primarily), with the insurance companies, of course, always ready to maximize their profits. The resulting pressures on physicians to join large organizations are creating a system of care which is becoming increasingly bureaucratically entangled. More and more, every medical decision is carried out with one eye on the financial auditor and the other eye on the quality-assurance reviewer. . . .

The trends toward the bureaucratization of medical care are being driven by economics and the marketplace. The Clinton plan has little or nothing to do with this. It is happening anyway. However, the Clinton plan is compatible with it (of course, adding another level of bureaucracy).

Perhaps Mr. Stelzer might argue that these developments do not constitute a crisis, but merely changes, and are a good example of how a free market can solve problems. I would argue, however, that the way everybody receives care is being driven by profit-oriented marketplace forces, and that consumers (patients) might not, in the end, like the entangled product that they get. Certainly the

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heavily managed providers do not like it.

I think that there *is* a crisis and that somebody needs to think about whether the system that is emerging from it is the system that we want.

RONALD ABRAMSON, M.D.
Tufts University School of Medicine
Wayland, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irwin M. Stelzer's assessment of health care in America has the correct perspective on health-care spending in relation to other expenditures and the current tendency to dump societal failures and their attendant costs onto the medical system. I would add two areas which would allow significant cost savings *and* medically make "sense" in terms of appropriate medical management.

First, hospitals, and especially their intensive-care units, are overwhelmed by a great many elderly, debilitated people, often with severe intellectual impairment from a variety of causes, who basically should be kept at home or in a nursing home. For many of these patients, there should be no hospitalization under any circumstance. . . . The judgment here extends not just to elderly patients, but to those who have other chronic, end-stage, debilitating diseases. We have to know when to stop.

The second area of cost-savings includes cost-shifting toward the patient for utilization of the system. Most Americans believe they should have every advantage of advanced medical technology, essentially free. They push for diagnostic testing, such as MRI, CT scans, and referrals to specialists. We need higher deductibles and increased co-payments so that patients would assume more of the costs. For those who are on the lower end of the income scale, tax write-offs for medical expenditures should reduce the burden, but up-front fees would certainly make people think twice about demanding more and more testing.

Physicians, especially primary-care physicians, face an onslaught of demand for referral and objective testing, which minimizes the physician's clinical judgment and emphasizes the risk of malpractice suits. At the other end of the spectrum, chronically ill and debilitated patients should not be completely exempt from some of the costs of utilizing the health-care system at later stages of life. Again, that would make those patients and their caretakers less inclined to push the system to its limits to preserve a life inappropriately.

MARTIN D. CAPLAN, M.D.
Richmond, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Kudos to Irwin M. Stelzer for demolishing the myth of the health-care crisis. He does an excellent job of showing both how limited the gaps in health-insurance coverage really are and the unreality of the problem of health-care costs. However, he does not go nearly far enough. First, there is no *health* crisis. Mr. Stelzer makes the valid point that many of America's health problems originate outside the health-care system, but he fails to note that, even so, Americans are healthier than ever. Infant-mortality rates have been steadily decreasing for the last 30 years or more, while life expectancy, especially over the age of forty, has increased. . . .

Second, there is no health-care-*quality* crisis. American scientific medicine is the envy of the world. In fact, the rest of the world, which has greatly benefited from American medical and biological science, has obtained a free ride at the expense of the American taxpayer. Also, American doctors are the best-trained and -equipped medical professionals anywhere. Even the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of Quebec come to America for medical treatment. . . . What kind of health-care system is it where the country's leaders have to go elsewhere for the best treatment?

Third, Mr. Stelzer is quite right that the liberal media are biased against the American health-care system, a condition that predates the Clinton presidency. . . . Most health-care experts, outside of a few physician groups, despise the American health-care system generally and doctors in particular. They almost unanimously favor some form of socialized or corporatized medicine. This can easily be seen by simply attending a few meetings of the American Public Health Association. When I taught a course on the American health-care system, I was unable to find a single supportive text to balance the countless critical ones.

Probably the best-known general work on the American health-care system which expresses these widely held views is sociologist Paul Starr's Pulitzer prize-winning book, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. Starr, an adviser to Hillary Clinton, endorses the growing decline of physician influence in health affairs as the just comeuppance due an arrogant bunch of the greedy. Thus, by scapegoating physicians, insurance companies, and drug companies, the Clintons are only following a well-trodden path created by countless academics.

ROBERT LERNER
Rockville, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Expert opinion has found grave flaws in the Clinton health-care plan. Generally, critical intelligence—including that of liberals—is skeptical, even as almost everyone goes along with the generous sentiments. But we are going to have to live down the football-rally emotions as we get around to more serious reflection.

We ought to consider that, political crowd-pleasing aside, the deepest flaw in the Clinton plan has to do with the very idea of universal coverage at a fairly high level of care. Essentially that is a utopian, even totalitarian, idea that has been tried and found either disastrous—as in the Soviet Union—or bankrupting, as in contemporary France, which this year is actively phasing back its health-care program that has put the nation $20 billion in the red and is being widely abused through fraud and waste.

Universal anything . . . goes against basic Americanism, according to which each person earns his way and is self-reliant as far as is humanly possible. For those who do not make it on these terms, there are safety nets, at a generally lower level. . . . We should consider extending that kind of service (perhaps with community clinics taking the pressure off emergency rooms). . . .

There can be no universal coverage of high quality; not only because it violates the realistic market approach appropriate to free democratic people (we are urging it on the Russians!), but because there are not enough resources for it. We cannot have universal coverage and maintain the truly high-quality medicine 160 million Americans want and are now getting unless we raise taxes

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drastically and go bankrupt that way. . . .

ROBERT GREER COHN
Stanford University
Stanford, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Bravo to Irwin M. Stelzer for addressing the central issue that everyone, including those most intimately affected, seems to have accepted: namely, that there is a health-care "crisis." . . .

The world looks to the United States for superior care, and Mr. Stelzer quite rightly points out that care is available to everyone who needs and wishes it. We need to find a way to convince a culturally mixed population to avail itself of already available care and to determine how to prevent many of the diseases and catastrophes that result from social and societal failures. . . . Yes, we probably have too much duplication of expensive technology, . . . but this follows in part because of antitrust actions by the government and because of local demands that inadequately reflect true needs. Nevertheless, one cannot compare proportions of national expenditures devoted to medical care: if the proportion is greater in one country, then less is spent on something else. Good health may be worth a sizable proportion of our budget.

One other point is worth mentioning. I brought it up in a speech to the American Academy of Political and Social Science in 1973; it is still valid: the emphasis on general practice, another centerpiece of the Clinton plan, is an exercise in nostalgia. The 21st century, soon to be upon us, . . . will make the corner doctor obsolete. What we will need is more specialists and . . . a triage system adapted from our wartime experiences in Vietnam, the Gulf, and elsewhere, whereby those truly in need of urgent care can be evacuated to centers equipped with the latest technical advances. Various health professions may well spring up to offer the kindly hand that the public craves and can serve as the first step in the triage system, but what we need are specialists concentrated in centers who can render instant opinions to those who are far off and give care to those patients who have been brought to the centers. The care of chronic diseases may devolve to allied health professions under the direction of specialists.

If we wish to avoid the rationing that is becoming a feature of all the systems we are told to admire and emulate, we must attempt to understand the future. . . .

GEORGE E. EHRLICH, M.D.
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As a physician who grew up in Britain and became a doctor in the socialized health service of that country, lived three years in the United States while taking specialist training, and has practiced for the past 21 years in Canada, I have just one word for those who think of bringing a Canadian-style health-care system to the U.S.: *don't.*

Americans are being grossly misled about the real state of health care in Canada today, by being shown snapshots of the Canadian system as it was ten or fifteen years ago. Things have changed dramatically since then, and the changes have been uniformly negative. Here in Ontario, the province with the largest population in Canada, almost every doctor will tell you that in the nine years since first a Left, and then a far-Left, party came into government, there has not been one single change for the better in medical care.

What we have today are increased waiting lists, delays in treatment, progressive reductions leading to shortages of staff and equipment, poorer availability of services, and contractions in what is covered under the so-called "free" universal coverage. The drive to lower costs has come with increased bureaucratic intrusion and controls and higher taxes. Choice has been lessened, as other priorities demand funds from the single, diminishing resource.

Worst of all, though, is the absence of incentives, which is inherent in a socialist system that pays the new, unproved graduate exactly the same fee as a highly competent, experienced specialist. This discourages excellence, and has already contributed to nearly tripling the number of doctors who have left the country in the past year.

The health-care system in Canada survives now only because of the dedication of an older generation of physicians who gained their training and experience under very difference conditions, and because of the generosity of you, our neighbors to the South, who still offer Canadians the excellence and the innovation that can develop only where a private alternative is allowed the freedom to flourish, and who provide the heart surgery and other treatments that are unavailable or greatly delayed here.

Americans who think that in pursuing a Canadian-style system they will be obtaining a combination of quality, efficiency, lower costs, and reasonable choices are deluding themselves. That was the Canada of fifteen years ago. What you would be getting is not Canadian-style health care, but what Canada is rapidly on its way to becoming, which is a country with Romanian-style health care. Is that what Americans really want?

JOSEPH BERGER, M.D.
Downsview, Ontario, Canada

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

For at least twenty years an assortment of intellectuals, academicians, and Democratic politicians has been proclaiming a crisis in American health care. The news media have willingly conveyed this message to the public, scaring the wits out of some and convincing many that something must be horribly wrong, even if they personally thought their medical care was superb.

Irwin M. Stelzer has done an excellent job analyzing the facts behind this phony crisis, and, more importantly, explaining why it was concocted in the first place. He is right to note that the Democratic party needs the welfare state and it needs as many people dependent on the welfare state as it can possibly get. By the early 1970's, the Democrats had nothing further to gain from the poor and the working class. In order to survive and thrive, the Democrats must create greater dependence among middle-class Americans. Health-care "reform" is one way this can be accomplished.

Mr. Stelzer is correct that the two most important components of the "crisis"—costs and the uninsured—have been exaggerated and the data manipulated to achieve the desired political effect. We do spend a great deal of money in the United States on health care, but we *receive* a great deal in return. When middle-class Americans find out what cost controls really mean on a day-to-day basis, they are going to be surprised.

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Mr. Stelzer is also correct about the problem of the uninsured. The number of chronically or long-term uninsured is much smaller than the figure used by the news media. Something needs to be done for this group of people, but the Clinton approach is that if you have a fly in your china cabinet, kill it with a sledgehammer.

The real point of the Clinton plan is neither health nor health care. It is power. The point is to give Washington greater control over the lives of middle-class Americans. If these tactics work, look for a housing "crisis," and a food "crisis," and so on.

The battle over the health-care system began years ago and is certainly not over. Irwin M. Stelzer's article deserves to be read by all those who think ours is a pretty good system. They should also keep in mind that the health-care system is like a fine old mansion. Once it is demolished, you will never see its like again.

THOMAS WILSON
Montgomery, Alabama

IRWIN M. STELZER writes:

I am content that any fair reading of my article and these letters will lead the reader to conclude: (1) the magnitude of America's health-care problems has been overblown by those who need to generate a "crisis" in order to garner support for a radical overhaul of a system that, in its present, imperfect form, already satisfies three-quarters of the American people; (2) this country's health-care system is superior to that of other countries; witness the fact that few Bostonians eschew Massachusetts General in order to fly to Japan or elsewhere for care, whereas the reverse traffic is well known; (3) costs can, indeed, be lowered by curtailing the availability of care (rationing) or reducing its quality (four-minute visits to doctors), but this is not what Americans want.

That leaves the question of how many people are uninsured, either temporarily or for what seems to various commentators to be a substantial period of time. Rather than wade through these statistics again, it seems that we can safely conclude that however many uninsured there are at any given time, they are not denied health care; the total includes many who quickly become insured again and many uninsured, especially the young, who can afford but do not choose to buy insurance. The genuine problems of the uninsured can be solved by subsidizing the insurance premiums of the poor and by mandating portability, both of which measures I favor. No radical socialization of the American health-care system, no huge bureaucracy, no quotas for specialists, no compulsory limitation of freedom of choice, and no system of price control are called for by any of the data presented in any studies or in any of these letters.

To Joseph White, who feels he has been misquoted, I offer my regrets for any pain I may have caused him. But a careful reading of his letter reveals more anger than reason. I said Britain has kept its costs down by restricting its capacity to render care. "Yes," says Mr. White. He would spend more money, were he British, but is quite confident that he would not have to spend as much as we spend in America in order to eliminate waiting lists. How he knows that is not revealed. And he now concedes that the British "should do more" to assist those in need of dialysis.

Mr. White rejects my characterization of his study of Australia. I said that one can reasonably conclude from his work that "Australia faces . . . availability restrictions. . . ." He responds by quoting his original text, which states that Australia "has reached a point where restrictions in its national system . . . are serious enough . . ." to induce people to buy supplementary private insurance. And he concedes that "people who need an elective operation soon" do indeed buy private coverage. Why? Because they are satisfied with the capacity of the national system to render service? Hardly.

He also objects to my characterization of his conclusions about Canada. And then, remarkably, he agrees that, "in a few well-publicized cases," including the important one of cardiac surgery, "the growth of demand for care in Canada has outstripped supply." I go on to say that Canada has reduced the services covered, to which Mr. White replies that there has been "very, very little" such reduction. I suppose that the magnitude of the withdrawal of services is in the eye of the beholder, but withdrawal there has been, supporting my point that Canada's experience suggests that President Clinton's promise of health care "they can never take away from you" is clearly not proved by the Canadian experience, where some of the health care offered by the national system has just been "taken away."

And, turning to cost, Mr. White makes what he must think is a cute debating point by stating that the cost increases I have characterized as "unbearable" in Canada have been lower than the increases in the United States. But that misses the point: we are a richer country. We can tolerate higher costs for medical care—and choose to do so. So increases that are unbearable in Canada are bearable in America, especially if required to avoid the "increased waiting lists, delays in treatment, . . . shortage of staff and equipment, poorer availability of services, and contraction in what is covered" described by Joseph Berger, a physician practicing in Canada. And for Jacob S. Hacker to join Mr. White in citing the facts that Canadians visit their physicians more often and stay in hospitals longer as proof of the superiority of Canadian care is odd, rather like saying that the people who visit their repairman most frequently, and leave their cars there for the longest time, have the most serviceable automobiles. Is not one plausible reason for the greater frequency of visits to physicians that those visits are shorter, as Mr. White, if asked, would surely tell Mr. Hacker is the case in Japan? And, perhaps, as a consequence of brevity, less efficacious.

Failure to understand the difference between rich and poor countries' consumption patterns also leads Mr. Hacker astray. He says not only do we spend more on health care than do other countries, but we also spend "a much higher percentage of our national income." Of course we do. Citizens of poor countries spend almost 100 percent of their incomes on food and shelter, and a trivial percentage on health care. Are they therefore better off, the beneficiaries of a more efficient health-care system? As a rich country, one whose citizens spend what elsewhere would be small fortunes on family trips to Disneyland, we should feel no embarrassment at devoting a higher portion of our income to health care—and a higher portion, still, of any future increments in our incomes.

I could go on. Mr. Hacker says

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that Americans are not more demanding of first-class health care than are citizens of other countries, and offers as support the fact that we "spend fewer days in the hospital." Most observers think shorter stays are a good thing, a result of insistence on the technologically-intensive medicine that brings Americans so many benefits—among them, shorter hospital stays and, important in appraising costs, fewer work days lost. If Mr. Hacker's academic studies lead him to conclude that "it is doctors, not patients," who demand costly diagnostic and treatment techniques, he might consider Martin D. Caplan's letter. Dr. Caplan's experience is that patients demand "every advantage of advanced medical technology," and his suggestion for higher co-payments is a quite sensible solution—far better than doctor-bashing or rationing of medical services by a government board.

But enough. The facts, it seems, are catching up with the scaremongers, and support for the most draconian features of the Clinton plan is drifting rapidly away. Senator Moynihan says that the regional buying groups are dead; most Democrats concede that employer mandates will not be part of the final package; the provision that would have government planners limit the number of doctors who may be trained in each specialty, and compound the insanity by setting gender and racial quotas for each specialty, remains attractive only to Mrs. Clinton and her adviser, Ira Magaziner, and should be buried forever if we heed George E. Ehrlich's warning that more, not fewer, specialists will be needed in the future. The more the public learns about the Clinton plan, the less it likes it. So it may all come right in the end, as we sensibly address a problem, and tweak the system rather than panic at a manufactured crisis, and destroy it.

Jewish Family Values

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Jack Wertheimer's "Family Values & the Jews" [January] includes a frontal assault against the rabbinate and the religious movements of American Judaism. He is critical of these two groups "who should be the natural leaders to shore up the crumbling Jewish family." Mr. Wertheimer characterizes rabbis and lay leaders alike as feeling "powerless to influence Jews at large or . . . fearful of saying anything that might drive away the minority who actually join their synagogues." It is surprising that a professor at the rabbinical school of the Jewish Theological Seminary chastises the rabbinate, by asserting: "Today, as rabbis become therapists, the community has found itself largely bereft of the superego, in the form of religious leaders willing to articulate what it should and can do." He is particularly uninformed when he distorts our response to issues of homosexuality and human sexuality in general, about which we have neither been silent nor "powerless." Indeed, the Rabbinical Assembly has appointed a blue-ribbon committee which is studying human sexuality and will render a report to our law committee. Given the limitations of space, I will focus upon only one aspect of Mr. Wertheimer's subsequent illustrations of his thesis, e.g., the response of the Conservative movement to interfaith marriage, the core family-value issue within the Jewish-continuity deliberations.

Contrary to Mr. Wertheimer's accusation of silence and/or appeasement with regard to inter-

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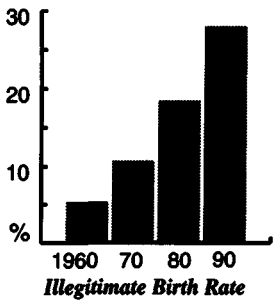

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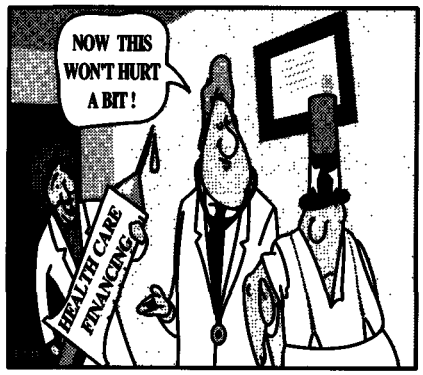

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marriage, the Conservative movement, in spite of voices urging us to accede to "demographic reality," has regularly reaffirmed and strengthened its long record of opposition to "out-marriage." For example, two years ago the biennial convention of the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism highlighted a major address by Steven Bayme, director of the Department of Jewish Communal Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, and of its William Petschek National Jewish Family Center, urging Conservative Judaism to fortify its record of promoting in-marriage. In response, the United Synagogue launched an aggressive venture of publications and programs to increase endogamy. The United Synagogue Commission on Promoting Marriage Within the Faith clearly articulates "prevention as its goal."

Booklets produced by this recent initiative include *The Mitzvah of Endogamy*, by Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue; *Ground for Concern: 14 Questions and Answers Regarding Intermarriage*, by Rabbi Alan Silverstein, vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly, as well his forthcoming *It All Begins With a Date: Parent Young-Adult Dialogues Regarding Interdating*; and *Guidelines With Regard to Intermarriage for the Congregational School*, by Rabbi Shelley Melzer.

In similar fashion, the Rabbinical Assembly has formally prohibited its members from officiating at interfaith marriage ceremonies or recognizing patrilineal descent, and has endorsed the United Synagogue's refusal to allow non-Jewish spouses of Jews to be eligible for membership in Conservative congregations. Most striking has been the decision of the National Executive Committee of United Synagogue Youth to exclude from its leadership ranks any Jewish teenager who engages in interdating. At every official level, the Conservative movement has been clear and forceful in reinforcing traditional Jewish values concerning in-marriage. The record clearly contradicts Mr. Wertheimer's allegations.

So why do some Conservative Jews nonetheless intermarry? The reason is not to be found in Mr. Wertheimer's simplistic diatribe against rabbinic and lay leaders, but rather in the social perils offered by America's increasingly open society. In a masterful essay published by the Petschek Center, Professor Jonathan D. Sarna has demonstrated that, in contrast to 1960, when Asian and white-ethnic as well as religious groups by and large married people of similar backgrounds, in the 1990's each sector of the American population has been acceding to assimilatory pressures to blend into a contemporary "melting pot." Conservative Judaism joins the other branches of organized Jewish religious life in seeking to swim against this social tidal wave. It is the rabbinate which is in the forefront of this effort. We will continue to fight this critical battle on behalf of Jewish continuity, despite the daunting degree to which some Jews will ignore our teachings, and despite the harsh attacks of misleading voices like Jack Wertheimer, alleging to speak "in the name of traditional values."

[Rabbi] Gerald L. Zelizer
President, Rabbinical Assembly
New York City

Jack Wertheimer writes:

His protestations notwithstanding, Gerald L. Zelizer knows full well that not all sectors of the American rabbinate, including constituents of his organization, have spoken forcefully or clearly on the issues that I raise in my article, but have either vacillated or entirely ducked some of them. The blue-ribbon committee to which he refers, for example, was established because there is a great deal of confusion and conflict over matters that should have been resolved. The Rabbinical Assembly has indeed hosted Steven Bayme, but it has also invited keynote addresses from sociologists, as well as its own members, which have advocated "realistic" responses to intermarriage, the religious status of homosexual Jews, and even patrilineality.

Although I could have done without some of the invective, I am pleased that my article elicited so forthright a response from Rabbi Zelizer. The Jewish community will benefit from the unequivocal positions he has enunciated in his letter.

The Real World Order

To the Editor of Commentary:

Commentary is a forum for great debates, but Patrick Glynn's review of *The Real World Order: Zones of Peace/Zones of Turmoil*, which I wrote with the late Aaron Wildavsky [Books in Review, October 1993], leads away from debate about the new ideas our book presents concerning the long-term character of world politics, by conflating what we said with familiar positions in the current policy debate.

For example, his review accuses us of recommending a policy of "general noninvolvement in the outside world." In fact, our recommendation is "to participate with other democracies in efforts to limit violence and encourage democracy in the zones of turmoil. . . ." And our conclusion is that "the United States must be engaged in the effort to improve international order in the zones of turmoil. . . ." We also argue that, "particularly during the current transition, . . . there may be an important need for the United States to take leadership responsibility in the world."

Mr. Glynn thinks we oppose an activist role for the U.S.—but what we actually say is that in the future, U.S. activism will have to be justified on a basis different from before. Most American uses of force will not be necessary to protect the life of our country, even indirectly, but will be required by our sense of obligation as the most prominent and competent citizen of the world community, by our need to help make the world "a little better than a den of thieves."

However, the point of *The Real World Order* is not to make recommendations, but to describe the new shape of the world, so that people can make their own recommendations, using their own values and analysis. . . .

Mr. Glynn's review does not address a basic proposition asserted in our book: that there is a fundamental difference between threats to a country's independence or survival and all lesser threats. This seems obvious, but the implications are surprisingly pervasive. The question for debate is whether or not, in the absence of practically any danger of being conquered, the security situation of the U.S. and the great democracies today is fundamentally different from that of great powers in the past, even though these countries still face significant threats to their interests and citizens. . . .

Most of those who see, as we

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do, an urgent need for American action, feel more comfortable basing their arguments on "vital national interests," or long-term threats to our national security. But continuing to justify all intervention in foreign conflicts on the basis of danger to our country, after the Soviet threat has been removed, is like an addiction—it always seems too soon to stop. Sooner or later, the vital-national-interest argument is going to get too thin to carry the debate. So we forthrightly argue for action on the basis of responsibility to the world, and try to figure out the implications of going in this direction. . . .

Pursuing goals that go beyond narrow national interest requires policy-making and political consensus-building that is significantly different from our cold-war policy-making. Often it will be more like altruism than like traditional foreign-policy thinking.

If we make decisions to intervene in conflicts in the zones of turmoil on the basis of "good citizenship," isn't it inevitable that there will be strong pressures to make such decisions in collaboration with other countries? Are we the only ones who are wise and good, who have to carry the burden alone? This just won't fly as standard operating procedure; we will be forced into multilateralism, whether it works or not.

We propose that America's increased need for external moral authority should be met by acting in agreement with other great democracies—unless the UN can be changed so that it has more integrity. Mr. Glynn is wrong that we have excessive faith that the other democracies—or the UN—can be counted on to carry their share of the load. Our position is not that they will be up to the challenge; it is that the time is coming when, if they do not carry their share, the load will not be carried, cannot be carried. Therefore, we had better start working toward load- and decision-sharing. This may not be pessimism, but it certainly is not optimism. . . .

MAX SINGER
Washington, D.C.

Benjamin Chavis & the NAACP

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Arch Puddington's attack on Benjamin Chavis and the NAACP

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

SPRING 1994

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RICHARD KOHN

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["The NAACP Turns Left," January] is, at best, puzzling.

I have worked on periodic projects with Benjamin Chavis over the past decade and have never heard him, whether in private or in public, say anything about Jews or Israel that even approximates the statements Mr. Puddington attributes to him. It is, therefore, difficult to assess the broadside attack on Chavis's earlier statements. Although I cannot directly assess the accuracy or context of the quotes that Mr. Puddington attributes to Chavis, Mr. Puddington's "logic" is clearly suspect. Thus, for example, because Chavis admired the Sandinistas, "it can therefore be inferred" that he would have liked to import state socialism into the United States. Then, taking the inference as fact, Mr. Puddington goes on to attack Chavis for his subversive desire.

Mr. Puddington seems determined not to credit Chavis with *any* positive achievements. He repeatedly casts in sinister terms activities that most COMMENTARY readers would, I assume, support. Thus he describes Chavis's campaign to bring Southern blacks to Chicago to help organize support for the late mayor, Harold Washington, as though it were something nefarious. What nonsense! Mayor Washington led an enlightened, biracial city government at a time when our society desperately needed such leadership. Extraordinarily popular among blacks and Jews, he consequently enjoyed significant support from outside the city. Many supporters, Jewish and black alike, sent money from afar; others traveled to Chicago to help.

Even more puzzling is Mr. Puddington's attack on Chavis's forceful and visionary articulation of the problems of "environmental racism": i.e., that certain environmental problems, particularly the locating of toxic-waste dumps, disproportionately affect minority communities. An extraordinary array of mainstream environmental, religious, and political groups now accept this analysis—including the President, who signed an executive order on environmental racism in February. Benjamin Chavis has helped forge numerous mainstream Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious organizations into a coalition on this issue. Mr. Puddington implies that Chavis's promise to lead protests at such sites in minority communities is radical. Good for Chavis.

Most alarming is Mr. Puddington's attack on Chavis's work since assuming the reins of the NAACP. What are Mr. Puddington's accusations? First, that Chavis wants to internationalize the organization, starting chapters in South Africa and the Caribbean, both areas with which many African-Americans have long and close ties. Mr. Puddington's critique echoes writings unfriendly to Jews that point to B'nai B'rith chapters in 51 countries as evidence of an international Jewish conspiracy. Second, that Chavis facilitated a summit of gang leaders from across the country to talk about ending violence. This was an extraordinary accomplishment that forcefully addressed the problems of gang violence, yet Mr. Puddington damns him for it. Third, and most astonishing, Mr. Puddington condemns Chavis because Chavis "pushed an already existing project, the NAACP's Fairshare campaign to pressure large corporations to hire more blacks and otherwise invest in the black community." At a time when the *Wall Street Journal*, this past September, determined that only blacks had a net decrease in employment from the recession of the early 1990's, it would have been irresponsible to abandon one of the organization's most effective programs.

Mr. Puddington concludes from all this that,

> under [Chavis's] leadership, the NAACP, historically the most mainstream and biracial civil-rights organization, now espouses a position once held only by the most radical organizations and personalities in the black community.

Let me see if I have this straight. Let us use only Mr. Puddington's own measure of Chavis's accomplishments since assuming the directorship of the NAACP to assess his place in the political spectrum. Because Chavis continues a program created and implemented by his predecessor, Benjamin Hooks (whom Mr. Puddington describes as a "civil-rights moderate"), and because he continues to fight against disproportionate locating of toxic-waste dumps in minority communities, a position the President and Vice President both espouse, and because he brought gangs together to try to end violence, and because he wants to begin chapters in other countries, Benjamin Chavis has radicalized the NAACP?

Be fair, Mr. Puddington. Let Chavis be measured by what he does and says in this new position. So measuring, I have myself had occasional disagreements with him, most profoundly and strenuously over Minister Farrakhan. (And yet his was one of the most articulate, clear, and unequivocal public denunciations of Khalid Muhammed's vile anti-Semitic diatribe.) But on the whole, Chavis is carrying the 85-year tradition of the NAACP into the 21st century with energy, vision, and creativity; not making it over in the image Mr. Puddington paints in his article. The NAACP remains the nation's preeminent civil-rights organization, with over 2,200 chapters across America, that, day in and day out, under Chavis's leadership, are involved in the nitty-gritty work of civil rights, of transforming America for the better.

Benjamin Chavis has shown every desire to continue to work with the traditional coalition of decency, and to continue its historic and strong alliance with the Jewish community. Unless and until he deviates from that stance, let us allow him to get on with the work of justice and fairness for all Americans, and to do so with the good will and the good wishes of American Jewry.

[RABBI] DAVID SAPERSTEIN
Director, Religious Action Center
of Reform Judaism
Washington, D.C.

ARCH PUDDINGTON writes:

David Saperstein's letter stands as a textbook case of the powers of liberal self-delusion. He clings desperately to the fiction of a permanent alliance of blacks and Jews despite overwhelming evidence of wide divergence between the political goals of the two groups. He then compounds his dilemma by rushing to the defense of Benjamin Chavis, whose past record suggests absolutely no interest in reforging Rabbi Saperstein's "traditional coalition of decency," and who, in his determined embrace of Louis Farrakhan, has given clear indication that racial power politics, and not alliance-building, is the order of the day for the civil-rights movement of the 90's.

To address several of Rabbi Saperstein's specific points.

1. Nowhere did I say or infer

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anything remotely critical of the late Chicago mayor, Harold Washington. Washington, in fact, appears to have been a better-than-average urban mayor, and certainly was regarded as a hero by his black constituents. On the other hand, I do regard Chavis's project of importing black "reverse freedom riders" from the South to participate in Washington's reelection campaign as signaling an embarrassing misunderstanding of the nature of American democracy. Chicago is not Selma; Harold Washington was the product of urban machine politics, not a civil-rights crusader. Chavis's obliviousness to these distinctions, which he again displayed during last year's New York mayoral election with yet another reverse freedom-rider campaign, betrays a frame of mind which sees black political participation through the prism of the era of civil-rights protest. To Chavis, electoral politics is yet another manifestation of a broader racial-power contest. The consequences of this kind of thinking were vividly on display during the decline and fall of former District of Columbia mayor, Marion Barry, when many leading blacks, Chavis most definitely included, insisted that Barry's troubles stemmed from a white conspiracy to subvert strong black political leaders.

2. On the question of environmental racism, there is no consensus among environmental scientists as to whether minority neighborhoods are disproportionately targeted as the dumping grounds for toxic wastes and other pollutants. There is, on the other hand, indisputable evidence that minority organizations have profited through government contracts since the cry of environmental racism was raised. While I cannot attest to Chavis's grasp of the intricacies of environmental control, I am prepared to acknowledge that he fully understands how racial politics is played in America today. Whether this is good for America or, for that matter, for blacks is another matter entirely.

3. Chavis's plan to "internationalize" the NAACP by establishing chapters in other countries bothers me precisely because of his history of sympathy for radical and pro-Communist parties and movements throughout the third world. Like other blacks who share his third-worldist perspective, Chavis ignored brutality and repression when practiced by "progressive" regimes like Guinea or Ethiopia, while at the same time obsessively focusing his anger on Israel. Here, as in his view of domestic politics, Chavis views the world as driven by racial struggle, with America and other powerful white countries, including Israel, engaged in the systematic oppression of the world's darker-skinned peoples. This is a world view that has retarded black political progress in America and has proved absolutely devastating for Africans and other third-world peoples who suffer from the oppression of the state.

4. As I noted in my article, past efforts to reward or "empower" black youth gangs have almost always ended in catastrophe. It is, of course, always possible that Chavis will succeed where so many others failed. But Rabbi Saperstein should be aware that Chavis was prominent among those black leaders who seemed to deny the existence of a black-on-black crime epidemic until the problem became so acute, and the outrage of ordinary black citizens grew so insistent, that the traditional response of blaming white racism was deemed no longer sufficient. Given this background, a little skepticism about Chavis's credentials as a crime fighter is more than warranted.

5. Rabbi Saperstein seems reluctant to accept my carefully detailed account of Chavis's anti-Israel activism. I can assure him that the information is a matter of public record. Not once or twice, but repeatedly, Chavis attacked Israel through paid advertisements, jointly-signed statements, and demonstrations. At the same time, there is no record of his having uttered a word of rebuke to the PLO for its acts of terrorism. Such has been his obsession with Israel that he justified his highly vocal opposition to the Gulf war on the grounds that Israel's mistreatment of the Palestinians represented the real key to Middle East peace. I leave it to Rabbi Saperstein to judge what this record of anti-Israel animus says about Chavis's political and moral judgment.

6. That Chavis issued a condemnation of Khalid Muhammad's Kean College speech leaves me unimpressed. The real issue, after all, was not Chavis's reaction to Muhammad's disgraceful diatribe, but his relationship with Louis Farrakhan. On this issue, Chavis has made it clear that he will tolerate a certain level of anti-Semitism so long as it is not couched in the kind of crude language which characterizes the speeches of Khalid Muhammad. Chavis's flat assertion that Farrakhan is not anti-Semitic is in fact contradicted by the Nation of Islam leader's frequent declarations about the pervasive influence of Jews in American life and Jewish efforts to maintain blacks in a subordinate position. Indeed, hostility to whites and to Jews in particular is fundamental to Farrakhan's appeal, a fact which is surely understood by Chavis.

By choosing to include Farrakhan in the ranks of black leadership, Chavis is, among other things, making an important statement about his vision of the terms under which civil-rights politics will be waged in the future. More recently, he reinforced this message by organizing a meeting, convened without the knowledge of other NAACP leaders, designed to enhance the radical Left's influence within the traditionally liberal civil-rights organization. Those invited ranged from Angela Davis to Alton Maddox to Lenora Fulani to Sister Souljah—a veritable rogues' gallery of racial demagoguery and a list which includes a number of shrill enemies of Israel.

Rabbi Saperstein may convince himself that there is a place for Jews and for integrationist-minded whites generally in a coalition whose members include anti-Semites, partisans of the "anti-Zionist" struggle, and those who tolerate anti-Semites. Others will not so easily succumb to self-deception.

Benjamin Chavis has left little doubt of his intention to take the lead in reshaping racial politics in America along lines certain to alienate moderate blacks as well as the civil-rights movement's traditional white supporters. Rabbi Saperstein is obviously annoyed at my pointing out these difficult facts. My advice to him is to prepare himself for future, and quite possibly much angrier, controversies that are destined to come.

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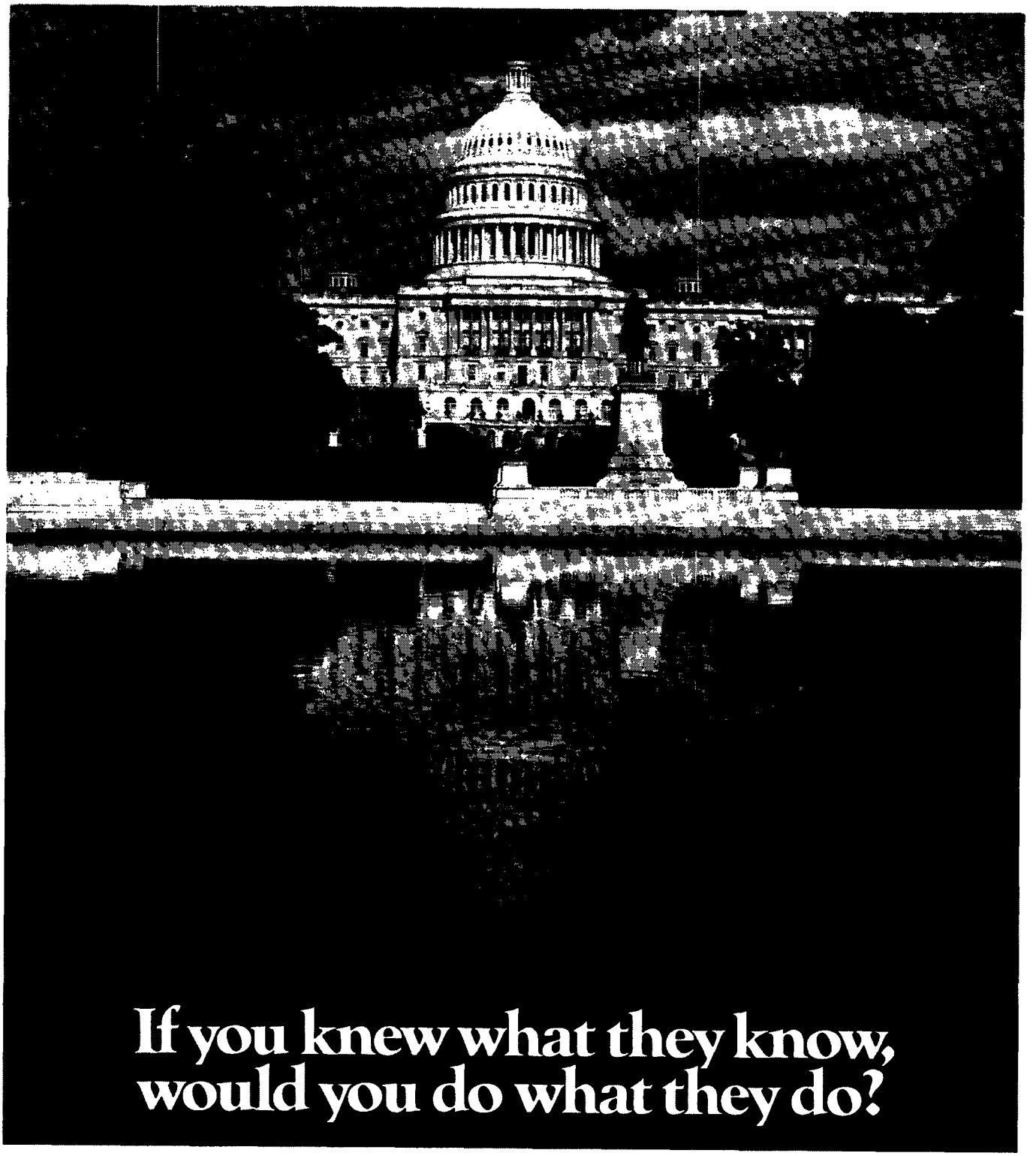

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Israel: Guilt & Politics

David Bar-Illan

On one of his condolence calls to Arab communities after the massacre by Dr. Baruch Goldstein of 29 Palestinian worshippers at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, the President of Israel, Ezer Weizman, visited the town of Nazareth. Responding to Weizman's expressions of sympathy, Nazareth's mayor, Toufik Ziad (who is also a member of the Israeli Knesset), called the massacre "Israel's *Kristallnacht.*" Though Weizman had repeatedly begged forgiveness for Goldstein's deed, he resented this analogy and said so. So indeed he should. Not only was the comparison of Israel with Nazi Germany outrageous in itself; invoking *Kristallnacht* was doubly offensive in suggesting that (as in Nazi Germany in 1938) the government had been behind Goldstein—and this at the very moment when the President of Israel's presence and his words were giving the lie to any such idea.

Nevertheless, Ziad's charge was taken in stride and hardly noticed in the Israeli press. For his allusion to *Kristallnacht* was but a pale echo of what was generally being said in those days by writers, columnists, and politicians on the Israeli Left.

Portraying Israel as a latter-day Nazi Germany is, of course, a favorite Arab propaganda line. From Edward Said at Columbia University to the Nablus man-in-the-street interviewed on CNN, the refrain has always been that the Israelis are doing to the Arabs what the Nazis did to the Jews. The purpose is not only the obvious one of identifying the Jewish enemy with the ultimate evildoers of all time; nor is it merely to hit Jews with what they naturally consider the most devastating insult imaginable. The subtler use of the Israel-equals-Nazis slogan is to reinforce the standard Arab portrayal of Zionism as a colonialist invasion of the Middle East by European Jews, supported by a Western world eager to expiate the guilt of the Holocaust.

It is a measure of the success of Arab propaganda that many Western journalists and pundits have accepted this version of history. That Zionism began 50 years before Hitler, or that the majority of Jews in Israel hail from Arab countries, are facts which—like many aspects of Israel's history—have been erased from general consciousness and memory.

It may seem surprising that so many Israeli leftists now subscribe to the "Judeo-Nazi" line.* But there is a certain logic in their embrace of it. In order to persuade themselves that Israel could live in peace and security with a Palestinian state abutting Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, they have to believe that it is only Israeli rule over Judea, Samaria, and Gaza that has made the Palestinians dangerous. And to believe this, it is a great help to see the Palestinians as innocent victims and the 130,000 Israelis who live in those territories as racist haters and potential murderers of Arabs.

But it is not the settlers alone who are excoriated by the Left. On the Friday following the massacre, Amnon Dankner—a popular writer, television personality, and professional *enfant terrible*—published a piece mocking the breast-beating that had been going on all over Israel:

> It's been a long time since we witnessed so disgusting and revolting a phenomenon as the so-called "soul-searching" undertaken by politicians, intellectuals, rabbis, and many other writers in the wake of the Hebron massacre. It's a display of self-prettification and self-deception, an embarrassing, sticky, chauvinist, ethnocentric spectacle, drawing from the same muddy source from which the murderer and his followers drew their own words and deeds. Under the cover of deep shock and a desire to distance themselves from the deed, all have condemned the act as so un-Jewish, so un-Israeli, so unlike us, and so unrepresentative of what we stand for, of what we have thought and done in all the thousands of years of our history, so alien and so exceptional, that our delicate souls cannot perceive how such a horrible thing emerged from our midst.
>
> We are so beautiful, so just and blond, that it is nothing short of astonishing that this man is a Jew like us, an Israeli like us. . . . Ah, how wonderful we are. What other nation would have done such soul-searching. How beautiful we are, how wonderful.

David Bar-Illan, whose most recent contribution to these pages was "Why a Palestinian State Is Still a Mortal Threat" (November 1993), is the editor of the *Jerusalem Post* and the author of *Eye on the Media.*

* The phrase itself was coined by the scientist-theologian Yeshayahu Leibowitz. Though he is not a leftist himself, his extreme dovishness and his virulent attacks on Israeli society have made him a hero of the Left.

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Dankner then proceeds to compare Israelis unfavorably with today's Germans, who conduct "giant demonstrations" against racist attacks on foreigners. Reciting the litany of Israeli sins in the manner of the Yom Kippur prayers, he writes:

> We beautiful Jews have bombed homes, broken arms and legs, shot children—hundreds of children killed!—humiliated, harassed, burst into homes, broken furniture, trampled human dignity, tortured when it was necessary and when it was not. For so many years we Jews, who have robbed houses and fields, confiscated property, treated with contempt and racism those under our rule, called ourselves "enlightened occupiers," and busied ourselves with masturbatory, self-deceiving palaver, like "if the British or Americans were the rulers in the territories they would have done much worse things." We the wise, we the just and blond Jews, who sank ourselves in the swamp of the occupation, vanquished another nation, hated it, harassed it, and settled on its land and stuck maniacs in its towns, we are so wonderful that it is simply a wonder that one such Goldstein could come out of us. He is just not one of us, he's just some bum from Brooklyn who due to some regrettable bureaucratic error received a weapon and the rank of captain.

In the end, Dankner despairs of the ability of these Jewish "blond" Aryans, who consider themselves a superior race, to do, even now, the right thing:

> We will not save our souls by getting out at once from the territories, we won't expel the maniacs from the heart of Hebron and the madmen from the tomb of Joseph in Nablus. We shall show everyone that we are not only just and beautiful but resolute and adamant about what's ours. For He has chosen us and sanctified us above all nations of the earth. Give us a mirror and we shall lustfully kiss our image. And we shall never say that we are sad and ashamed as human beings. No. Only as Jews and Israelis, which is far superior to just human beings. Long live us, forever and ever.

A similar article by the columnist Haim Baram (whose brother Uzi is Minister of Tourism in the Rabin government) was illustrated with a caricature of a settler which fit Foreign Minister Shimon Peres's description of residents of the territories as "gun-toting bearded men with yarmulkes." Except that in this drawing the settler was goose-stepping and had his arm raised in a Nazi salute.

In his article, Baram calls the Declaration of Principles signed last September on the White House lawn a shameful document of surrender by the PLO, unimplementable because of its gross unfairness to the Palestinians. And in condemning Goldstein, he rejects any "symmetry between Jewish and Arab murders":

> Morally, I consider all spillers of blood loathsome. But politically there is a difference between the oppressor-killer, who murders to perpetuate the occupation (like Goldstein) and a freedom fighter, who struggles for his own and his people's liberation. What this is about is not just abstract ideals like independence or self-determination. The violence against the occupation is intended to liberate the Palestinian people from humiliating everyday life. The freedom fighters fight against those who rob their lands, exile their sons, arrest and detain thousands of human beings, humiliate and pressure people to make them traitors and collaborators, shoot and kill them incessantly, discriminate against them economically, starve them with closures, and contemn them as human beings. I don't justify acts of murder, but I feel free to assert that the depravity of those who hide behind an army of occupation and oppression to beat up on the oppressed nation is immeasurably greater than that of the Palestinians who spill blood.

IT WOULD be easy to dismiss these rantings as flaky, marginal, and irrelevant. But the likes of Baram and Dankner have become the tone-setters and the cutting edge of the Labor government. In fact, when Baram writes that he and his fellow leftists intend to "persuade the majority of the public" to accept a PLO-Hamas state on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, cutting through Jerusalem, he can point as a precedent to their prior success "on the issue of contacts with and recognition of the PLO." What they say today, Peres's Deputy Yossi Beilin will be saying tomorrow, and is likely to become government policy the day after that. (Already, for example, Beilin has proposed skipping the interim period of Palestinian autonomy prescribed by the Declaration of Principles and ceding part of Jerusalem to PLO rule right away.)

Moreover, far from being a phenomenon confined to the lunatic fringe, self-flagellation (more temperate in rhetoric, to be sure) was the order of the day in the mainstream as well. A case in point was Amos Oz, one of Israel's better-known writers and an establishment darling entrenched in what has become the political Center, who did an article for the *London Observer* immediately after the massacre. Since, he wrote, "The murderer, a well-known supporter of Rabbi Meir Kahane, was armed with ammunition supplied to him by Israel, which has armed dozens of other Kahane supporters," Oz offered the following advice:

> The government of Israel should immediately outlaw all of Kahane's supporters, see to it that known inciters are placed under arrest and brought to trial, instigate house searches in Qiryat Arba and other possible terrorist strongholds, and suggest that, as a result of the massacre, it will consider incorporating armed Palestinian police in the peacekeeping forces

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guarding trouble spots outside of the Gaza and Jericho regions.

Uncannily, these were almost exactly the demands the PLO would make the following week and which the Israel government would meet.

Nor did generalizations about the whole community of settlers—the vast majority of whom are ordinary Israeli citizens quietly raising their families and commuting to their jobs in Tel Aviv and Jersualem—give Oz liberal qualms:

> . . . these are the same inciters who, unlike Islamic fundamentalist agitators, were not deported, nor will they be deported over the border and their homes will not be destroyed or sealed up. But I see no difference between this Jewish murderer and these Jewish inciters and the Hamas and Islamic Jihad murderers and inciters: they do all in their power to prevent the Israel/Arab war from being resolved through compromise; they do all they can to turn it into a religious war between Judaism and Islam, between *Adonai* and *Allah*—till the very last drop of blood has been shed.

Oz, Baram, and Dankner were merely the more articulate among the numberless commentators and politicians who provided the kind of background music which made the government's acts of atonement seem, if anything, pale and inadequate. Not that the government did not try hard. In addition to President Weizman's visits to Hebron and other Palestinian communities, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the whole Israeli establishment profusely apologized for the massacre as if it had been committed by an arm of the state (thereby, ironically, lending an unintentional plausibility to the *Kristallnacht* comparison). A commission of inquiry was appointed by the government to investigate the security forces' failure to forestall the tragedy. And the victims' families were awarded substantial compensation. There can be no precedent in history for such an assumption of responsibility by a government for the acts of a private individual.

Beyond taking guilt upon itself, the government also took action as well, specifically in order to placate the PLO and persuade it to return to the peace talks. One thousand convicted Palestinian terrorists were released. The two fanatic Kahanist movements associated with Goldstein were outlawed. Other suspected Jewish extremists were harassed, interrogated, deprived of arms, arrested, and detained without trial under the emergency laws applied to terrorists. Israel agreed to enlarge the projected Palestinian police—a euphemism for a military force—and to having armed Palestinian police in Hebron and a foreign inspection force in Gaza, Jericho, and Hebron.

But perhaps the most important concession was made in the government's decision not to oppose a UN resolution describing the territories as "occupied Palestinian land"—thus implying that they belonged to a sovereign Palestine—and including Jerusalem as part of these occupied territories. True, the offensive language was used only in the preamble to the resolution, not its operative part; and the United States agreed to abstain in the vote on the preamble. Yet never before has an Israeli government acquiesced in a UN Security Council resolution treating the territories, let alone Jerusalem, as belonging to a Palestinian state.

And the government did more than just acquiesce. Warned that the PLO would consider returning to the negotiating table only if a tough resolution were passed (one also calling for stationing foreign troops in the territories to protect the Palestinian population), the Israeli government actually discouraged efforts to get the U.S. to veto it. Thus, when members of the pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), wanted to demand that the Clinton administration adhere to its own commitments on Jerusalem and to avoid prejudicing the Israel-PLO negotiations, they were bluntly advised by the Israeli ambassador to the U.S., Itamar Rabinovich, to lay off. UN resolutions were not important, they were told; the main thing was to pacify the PLO and get the talks back on track.

EVEN more perverse was the disappointment in Israel's Foreign Ministry with American reluctance to pressure Israel for more concessions. It is difficult to determine if the Clinton administration sincerely believed in its dictum that only the Israelis and Arabs could make peace with each other, and that Washington could only serve as an honest broker at the request of both sides; or if Clinton was simply wary of appearing to pressure Israel, since the only voters showing no erosion of support for him were American Jews. Perhaps both factors played a role. But in any event, Secretary of State Warren Christopher's unwillingness to twist Rabin's arm was viewed with alarm by Peres and Beilin, as was clear from a scathing attack on Christopher in *Ha'aretz*, Israel's leading paper, by its Washington correspondent, Akiva Eldar, known for his closeness to the Foreign Minister and his Deputy.

"It's a pity that the state inquiry commission [on the Hebron massacre] lacks the mandate to go abroad," Eldar wrote:

> Had Chief Justice Meir Shamgar and his colleagues [on the commission] been permitted to go to the U.S., it is doubtful that they would have exonerated Secretary of State Christopher or even President Clinton from responsibility for the calamity. . . . The settlers' activities appear in the current report of the [State Department's] human-rights division. CIA agents in Israel thoroughly reported on the Brooklyn Kahanists' evil deeds, and if reading open and secret material is too difficult for

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them, Christopher heard about the settlers from the leaders of the Palestinians. That is, if he did not fall asleep, as he did during Clinton's speech in Brussels and during his last conversation with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Veterans of the State Department cannot remember a Secretary so tired, bureaucratic, and indecisive. Asked about the fate of the occupied territories, he had a ready answer: the peace process is the solution, there is no other. And what has the Secretary done for this peace process? He groveled twice a week before Jewish leaders and promised that there would not be, God forbid, any pressure on Israel. There are a few devoted officials in the American team who have stood by the cradle of the peace process and who are dying for permission to rattle it. But the Secretary has curbed those who asked to intervene in the negotiations for fear that it would be interpreted as a provocation against the Rabin government.

Eldar, obviously speaking for his friends in the Foreign Ministry, would rather see a more active Secretary. So much so that he offers what must be the first Israeli endorsement of an official known for virulent anti-Israel positions:

> The [American] Jewish leadership, not yet free of the Likud's teats, knows why it prefers Christopher and strains so hard to block Strobe Talbott on his way to the office of Secretary of State. Talbott's articles in *Time* show that his opinions on the harm caused by the settlements in particular and the occupation in general are perfectly in tune with those of Peres and Yossi Beilin.

Talbott, it should be noted, did not oppose only the Likud government. He compared Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait to Israel's "invasion" of the West Bank and Gaza, which of course took place under the Labor government. But never mind. In the Orwellian political world into which significant elements of the Foreign Ministry seem to have entered, an American Secretary of State who is hostile to Israel is preferable to one who is evenhanded.

ABOUT 20 major massacres of Jewish civilians by Arabs have occurred since 1929—from the 67 Jews slaughtered in Hebron that year to the 15 killed in a tourist bus in Egypt in 1990. There have also been 11 attacks on synagogues by Arab terrorists—including the murder of 24 worshippers in Istanbul in 1986. And unlike the 29 Arabs gunned down at prayer in Hebron, the Jewish victims of these attacks were killed not by an individual who had snapped but by organized terrorist groups sponsored by internationally recognized regimes. Nor is there any record of apologies from any such group, or, for that matter, any Arab leader, including Yasir Arafat, whose people (including members of his own wing of the PLO) have murdered more than 30 Jews since the White House handshake alone.

There are those who think that the self-recrimination in Israel after the Hebron massacre spoke well for the moral sensibilities of the country. To the extent that it expressed a universal revulsion at the wanton shedding of blood, no doubt it did. But in many of its manifestations, it also expressed a degree of self-hatred that exceeded even the depths to which this pathology once reached in the Diaspora (and which statehood was supposed to cure). For the rest, one can only be awed by the skill with which the tragedy was turned into an excuse to make concessions to the PLO which that organization had already been demanding before the massacre in Hebron and which the government of Israel was evidently eager to grant.

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Washington's Biggest Scandal

Edward N. Luttwak

THE biggest Washington scandal by far has nothing to do with Arkansas real estate, is not being investigated by either Congress or a special prosecutor, and has made no headlines at all. In fact, the media have utterly failed to uncover the story even though hundreds of present and past government officials and military officers know all about it, as do some of the more attentive members of Congress. The scandal in question is nothing less than the collapse of civilian control over the military policies and military strategy of the United States.

Without even the need of a *coup d'état*, the power of decision that our civilian President is supposed to exercise through his appointed civilian officials has been seized by an all-military outfit that most Americans have never even heard of: the mixed Army-Navy-Marine-Air Force "Joint Staff" that serves the chairman and vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

It was not ever thus. On the contrary: in the days of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, it was civilian officials who notoriously interfered with purely military decisions, beginning in a small way with Kennedy's second-guessing of the U.S. Army's choice of jungle boots, and ending with Johnson's insistence that his own civilian aides of no known aerial expertise should decide just how many bombs of what exact type might be dropped at which end of what particular bridge in Vietnam. Air crews were killed or captured and cruelly imprisoned because of those decisions, which routinely disregarded the views of both expert air staffs and commanders on the spot.

In this as in other matters, it was Johnson's destiny to systematize what Kennedy had toyed with, for good or ill. It was so with civil rights, and it was so with military policy. Much interested in "guerrilla war" as he imagined it from the books he had read (all about derring-do in the jungle, rather than the invisible subversion of villages and towns by terror), Kennedy started interfering early on, to support his beloved Special Forces against the military hierarchy he regarded as incurably conventional.

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As against Kennedy's vision of Special Forces teams outfoxing the Vietcong in jungle combat, and winning the loyalty of contested villages by field medicine and pep talks, the generals could not overlook either the essential primacy of the cold war in U.S. global strategy, or the decisive role of terror in Vietnam itself.

The demands of the cold war meant that the U.S. Army and Marine Corps had to remain structured to fight a conventional war in Europe, and could not therefore be turned into an Asian constabulary to protect the 20,000 villages of Vietnam. Terror meant that it was no use winning over villages, because they could not be protected forever after.

The reason terror guaranteed the failure of the Special Forces, and of the entire "hearts-and-minds" strategy, is best explained by Marlon Brando at the very end of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, just about when the average viewer has had enough of the fat man's monologue and starts rewinding the tape. The bit about the Vietcong so possessed by the pure diamond-hard force of ideology that they cut off the arms of villagers who had allowed themselves to be vaccinated by U.S. medics may have been apocryphal, but it was certainly of no use to make nice to villagers who would soon be tortured and killed if they cast their lot with passing Americans.

Before Kennedy had the opportunity to discover his basic error in Vietnam, the Cuban missile crisis intervened to reinforce his contempt for professional military expertise. Having learned that in the nuclear age even the most detailed tactical decisions could have awesome strategic consequences (should Soviet blockade-runners be sunk after a classic over-the-bow warning shot, or could shots be accurately aimed to disable their rudders?), Kennedy and, long after him, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara misapplied that lesson to non-nuclear combat in Vietnam. The result was the displacement of military judgment and the operational art of war by typical business-school numerical indices of success, of which the "body count" was only the most notorious.

War being the domain of paradox and contradiction, it was not only that McNamara's numbers were not right—they were not even wrong

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(to borrow I. I. Rabi's classic formulation). When a village was counted as secure because its chief could sleep at home, it could indeed be secure—or else the chief himself could be Vietcong, and the numbers would never show the difference. Soon enough, everyone knew that the numbers were worthless, but from generals down to privates, U.S. troops were still forced to participate in the farcical record-keeping that added one more frustration to the bewildering landscape of futility that was Vietnam.

Given the twin American refusals either to invade the North or directly govern the South, defeat was in any case assured. But McNamara's attempt to fight the Vietnam war by statistical remote-control from his desk, along with the absurd micromanagement of the bombing direct from Lyndon Johnson's White House, gratuitously demoralized the officer corps, which already furiously resented the antiwar movement at home.

With the civilian chiefs themselves having turned civilian control into a sinister parody of their constitutional prerogatives, the smart set of younger officers, typically battalion commanders (as Colin Powell then was), thought long and hard to find remedies. Several of these remedies were eventually employed with great success during the Gulf war. To have no media around except under very firm control, and to brief civilian chiefs on war plans only after they had been worked out in too much detail to be changed, were only the most elementary countermeasures.

Much more sophisticated was the remedy for the civilian proclivity to limit strategic risks by only committing forces bit by bit, and for the presidential tendency to limit political risk by fighting wars without declaring them and without mobilizing the country. The former made combat more dangerous, the latter undermined public support for the armed forces, leaving them to fight on their own, morally isolated from a society still at peace. Both tendencies were neatly preempted by transferring virtually *all* logistic support forces to the reserves, forcing their mobilization for any combat to speak of, and by designing carefully interlocked expeditionary "packages" that could not be taken apart without losing much of their combat power.

In the period leading up to the Gulf war, civilian-defense officials knew in a general way what was going on, but they wrongly believed that these were merely procedural steps, examples of the administrative tinkering that diverts overstaffed military headquarters in peacetime. When, however, President Bush ordered a military deployment to Saudi Arabia in August 1990, it turned out that combat and support forces, active and reserve forces, were so wedged into each other that he could either send 200,000-odd or practically nobody. It also emerged that he had to call out the reserves from the very start, giving him no choice but fully to engage the country along with the armed forces.

Much had happened by then to make such bureaucratic contrivances by the Pentagon feasible, and to make them stick. One agency of the military resurgence from the nadir of Vietnam was a revulsion against the excesses of the antiwar movement, whose basic contention was tragically contradicted by all those boats full of misery that kept fleeing from the Communist peace. Another was the advent of the anti-antiwar Reagan administration, many of whose officials were not merely respectful toward the military and their views but positively deferential, and whose budgets financed the largest military build-up since the Korean war. After long years of severe economies since the early 1970's, the sudden abundance of money after 1981 naturally raised the morale of the armed forces, and it enormously enhanced the self-esteem of the officer corps.

The fat Reagan budgets also had a side effect that indirectly reduced civilian control: with all services and branches so generously funded, they were much less inclined to fight one another for money, allowing that much less opportunity for civilian officials to referee military quarrels, imposing their own authority in the process.

In the end, however, it was not the blind force of the tides of opinion, nor a deliberate choice by the Reagan administration, that drastically diminished civilian control, inaugurating the reign of the Joint Staff. In a prime example of the law of unintended consequences, it was a major piece of legislation, the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1987, that did the deed.

Vehemently supported by most of the self-described "military reformers,"* the Act provided, for the disease of interservice rivalry, the cure of a powerful Joint Staff and a chairman raised above the service Chiefs of Staff. Legislated in the wake of combat debacles caused by the uneasy cooperation of ever-competing services that gave us Jimmy Carter's Iran rescue attempt, with its Navy helicopters, Marine pilots, Army commandos, and Air Force transports that nobody could truly coordinate, the Great Pentagon Reform has since shown us that the only thing worse than interservice rivalry is interservice harmony.

By the time Goldwater-Nichols was passed, civilian control had already been eroding, and though the Act certainly furthered the process, it was not fully consummated until the accession of General Colin Powell to the

* Very much including the present writer. *Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*, Goldwater-Nichols was supposedly inspired in some part by my own book, *The Pentagon and the Art of War*, and I certainly testified for it before congressional committees, ignoring the sober warnings of my elders and betters.

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position of chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1989. And it was not until the election of Bill Clinton as President in 1992 that the degree to which the civil-military balance had changed became fully visible. Whether the issue was military service for homosexuals, post-Soviet budget levels, or military action in ex-Yugoslavia, Powell overruled the newly inaugurated Clinton with contemptuous ease.*

Powell has now been replaced by General John Shalikashvili, who does not share his predecessor's delight in outmaneuvering Presidents, but the power of the Joint Staff persists undiminished, at the expense of the civilians of the office of the Secretary of Defense. To be sure, we are not yet as Latin America once was, and the Joint Staff will not resist a direct order from the Secretary of Defense. But it is one thing to ban indoor smoking by royal command, quite another to obtain responsive staff work in all necessary detail from a military bureaucracy determined to have its own way.

Thus, for example, civilian Pentagon officials distressed by the massacres in ex-Yugoslavia ask for specific military options only to be ignored, and are then ridiculed as irresponsible armchair warriors if they persist. Presidential appointees concerned by what might happen if Kim Il Sung of North Korea decides to attack after all are not even allowed to examine the contingency war plans for the defense of South Korea—a privilege restricted by the Joint Staff to a small "cell" of selected officials.

But the everyday business of the Pentagon is dollars-and-cents "force-planning"—i.e., force-buying—rather than blood-and-iron war-planning, which anyway mostly belongs to the geographic commands for Europe, the Pacific, Latin America, and the Middle East. And it is precisely over roughly $260 billion worth of force-buying decisions that the Joint Staff now has a monopoly franchise as Washington's only official source of multiservice military expertise.

How the Joint Staff exercises that franchise can be seen from the way it conditioned the much publicized "Bottom-Up Review" launched by Clinton's first Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin (who has since been replaced by William Perry). Charged to define an all-new military structure for the post-cold-war era, the Joint Staff duly cogitated and calculated and coordinated—only to come up in the end with much the same old mix of ground, air, and naval forces as before. Itself manned by fixed ratios of Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force officers at each hierarchical level, the Joint Staff predictably obeyed the logic of its own composition by resisting any genuine reappraisal of the mix of U.S. military forces. Yet that had been the key aim of the Bottom-Up Review.

At a time when defense spending has fallen below 5 percent of the GNP (it was 12 percent at the height of the cold war in the early 1960's), the country can certainly afford what the Joint Staff wants. But what the Joint Staff wants does not meet either old or new security needs that happen not to correspond to traditional service preferences—needs as broad as low-casualty or noncasualty forms of aerial and robotic military strength for keeping the peace in a world increasingly disordered, and as narrow as penetrating weapons for use against underground nuclear-weapons facilities.

In the past, a Secretary of Defense might have overruled the Joint Staff, or he might have turned to his own civilian analysts to come up with alternatives that would reflect the oceanic transformations of recent years. But in our day there was no chance that any genuine alternatives for the established array of forces would even be examined, let alone seriously evaluated. As of now, therefore, the Clinton administration is committed to finding the money to pay for a fiscal-year 1999 military structure that looks very much like the one we already have, except for piecemeal reductions all around.

Soviet naval power is now a historical memory, the navy of the Russian federation is rapidly melting down, none of the plausible "threat countries" (Iran, North Korea, maybe Iraq) has anything larger than a smallish destroyer. Yet the U.S. Navy is to retain 346 warships, including twelve of the thirteen aircraft carriers it now has.

The Soviet army is no longer poised against NATO's front line, indeed there no longer is a NATO front line, and, more to the point, American society refuses to accept the casualties of peace-enforcement with U.S. ground troops. Yet the U.S. Army is to retain ten out of its fourteen active divisions—and all of them expensively kept at high states of readiness for instant deployment.

On the other hand, Air Force tactical fighter wings (with 72 aircraft each), both active and reserve, are to go down from 28 to 20. Yet the air power of all services is the most usable military instrument we have, because it risks the fewest casualties. The U.S. Marine Corps, by contrast, is to keep 174,000 out of its current active-duty

* In reaction to early suggestions that Serbian artillery in Bosnia might be silenced by the threat of air strikes—the very policy finally adopted a year later, after many tragedies, after he had gone—Powell kept a photograph of well-camouflaged Serbian gun positions in his office, which he would show to visitors in order to ridicule the military ignorance of those who advocated the use of air power, including Clinton, of course. It was typical of this most manipulative of generals that Powell carefully avoided explaining the difference between a one-time air attack, which can indeed fail completely because of enemy camouflage or merely bad weather, and sustained reconnaissance-and-strike patrols over many days and weeks, which would certainly spot and destroy enough artillery pieces over time to stop the bombardment of Bosnian cities.

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strength of 182,000, a truly trivial reduction, even though as a predominantly infantry force it is especially constrained by the fear of casualties, while its costly amphibious vocation has become very dubious indeed—Inchon was its last combat landing, in 1950.

This miracle of continuity has been achieved by an intellectual construct of fine bureaucratic artistry. First, an overall force was designed that would enable the United States to replicate the Gulf war—not the war that was actually fought, a mix of 90-percent bombing and 10-percent ground combat, but the war that was *supposed* to have been fought, complete with the Marine landing that had to be canceled because of Iraqi sea mines, the vast fleets that filled the Persian Gulf to no purpose in the absence of Iraqi warships, and the two army corps elaborately supplied for the march on Baghdad that was very soon called off.

The Joint Staff might have paused to reflect that a Gulf War II would very likely resemble the real Gulf war, for the very good reason that precision air attack is now a routine accomplishment rather than a rare virtuoso performance. But to do that would have greatly favored the Air Force, violating the iron logic of the Joint Staff's balanced composition. So the array of forces it came up with to win a "major regional conflict" was duly balanced: eight active and six reserve Army divisions; eight Navy aircraft-carrier battle groups with cruisers and destroyers in attendance; five active Marine brigades and one reserve division; and ten active and six reserve fighter wings.

Notice the neat sleight-of-hand right from the start: evoke the Gulf war so recently fought for realism, quietly replace it with the planned war that was never fought, and then base the required forces on the latter rather than on the former.

But now another problem arose, in the form of the major cuts that would result from this "one-war" force. To avert the danger of being stiffed with its own scenario, the Joint Staff came up with its next bit of artifice. With seeming plausibility, it argued that if U.S. forces were sent off to fight a major regional war somewhere, that would be the perfect opportunity for another aggressor to attack elsewhere. A one-war force would therefore practically invite a second war, launched in the knowledge that the U.S. military was already fully committed.

In a world which contained ten or twenty potential aggressors of respectable strength, all of them poised to attack countries that we were actually inclined to defend—unlike Bosnia or Moldavia, for example—that would be a perfectly sound bit of strategic thinking. As it is, with only Iran and North Korea as bona-fide threats of any importance, the argument is paper thin to begin with, and in any case politically unrealistic to an extreme degree. It is not by accident that North Korea remained on its best behavior when most of the deployable U.S. forces were in the sands of Saudi Arabia, irremediably tied down by "Desert Shield." For what invites aggression is not action but inaction, as in Bosnia for so long. Faced by a United States demonstrably willing to fight a major regional conflict somewhere, that hard-to-find second potential aggressor of the scenario writers is much more likely to be dissuaded than encouraged. Which is to say that an American President who orders U.S. forces into combat is a powerful deterrent in himself.

As for having any forces to fight with once a "major regional conflict" is under way, that is what the reserves are for, *in addition* to the left-over active forces. Still, it is undeniably prudent to keep some extra forces to contain a second aggressor while winning a major regional war. This "win-plus-hold" scenario called for two more active Army divisions, two more Navy carrier battle groups, and four more fighter wings.

With those forces added to the total, the Clinton administration could still have saved a bit of money, even if the Pentagon's research-and-development budget were also kept in funds. But it was not to be. The next move of the Joint Staff was to condemn the win-plus-hold scenario as shamefully inadequate, wheeling in what were said to be Korean and Japanese complaints to make the case, on the assumption that it is in Korea that the United States would "hold" while winning a war elsewhere.

The South Koreans do not normally barge in to protest the interim results of Pentagon staff studies in progress, so it is more than likely that their objection was deliberately elicited, if it was voiced at all. But even if it was voiced, why should it have been treated with such deference? That North Korea is a fierce, heavily armed enemy in spite of a crumbling economy is not in doubt, but neither is the South Korean refusal to spend its own money to defend itself in the manner of other threatened countries: as against Israel's 10-12 percent of its gross national product, and our own 5-percent-plus, South Korea has not reached 4 percent in recent years. It seems that the North Korean threat is more treasured by Pentagon military planners than feared by South Korean economic planners.

As for the supposed Japanese complaint, it is deliciously implausible. Unwilling as they are to increase their own military spending above 1 percent of their gross national product (for good reason, given Asian fears of their military potential), the Japanese never complain that they are poorly defended, to forestall the obvious rejoinder that they should do more for themselves.

However contrived and implausible, the Korean and Japanese "objections" were the crucial step in the reasoning that yielded the final "win-two-nearly-simultaneous-major-regional-wars" scenario.

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IN SHORT, in a world bereft of the Soviet threat, the Joint Staff planners had ingeniously succeeded in justifying the array of forces they had wanted all along—forces of imposing size and (a key priority) of balanced composition as among services and branches. For when military staffs are left to decide which kinds of forces should be kept for the future, their choices almost inevitably reflect the service and branch origins of their members; and because staffing ratios among the different services and branches just as inevitably reflect the combat needs and glories of prior wars, the past becomes prologue. How else did the horse cavalry survive into the 1930's, long after the advent of barbed wire and machine guns?

Even then, one more bureaucratic maneuver remained, of such true elegance that it will long continue to evoke the admiration of aficionados. The two-war scenario was actually crafted to require a force *significantly larger* than the one finally planned for fiscal year 1999, with 20 instead of 15 Army divisions, 12 complete carrier battle groups instead of 11, and 24 instead of 20 fighter wings.

How could the planners have thus ignored their own supposedly compelling calculations to accept less? In a one-step-back, two-steps-forward minuet, the Joint Staff first demanded the larger force, and then graciously conceded that the United States could perhaps survive with a little less—if, that is, a great deal of additional money were first spent on a long list of "critical force enhancements."

Contrary to what one might presume, this was not a clever way of asking for innovative equipment—minesweepers; nonlethal weapons for peacekeeping; remotely-piloted vehicles; target-specialized missiles and bombs; robotic sentries; etc.—now underfunded because it does not conform to the classic service preferences. Nor was it a way of getting more strategic air power of global reach, as opposed to the Army's beloved tanks, the Navy's carriers, and the Air Force's fighters. Instead of any of that, the list of "enhancements" is a typical Joint Staff product that reflects its predominantly ground-force composition: more Army equipment prepositioned overseas; Army National Guard combat readiness; improved support-force readiness for the Army Guard and reserve; improved anti-armor weapons; and even more Marines than Bush had planned to keep, as well as added airlift and sealift, and improved command and control.

This egregious list having been accepted by the Pentagon's civilians, the Clinton administration is now committed to pay not only for the Bottom-Up-Review force but also for the extras, which include such beauties as two brigades' worth of Army equipment to be kept in Korea, a country that could easily pay for that and much more. All this is now in the Defense Department budget request for 1995 sent to Congress by President Clinton in February.

Strategy is choice, and we ought to be making fundamentally new military choices to fit a world greatly transformed. But it seems that the United States is now suffering from an Acquired Strategic Deficiency Syndrome, caused by the Joint Staff virus of interservice harmony at all costs.

The officers of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force—the impressively competent, routinely brave, yet reassuringly human protagonists of the Gulf war whom we met through CNN—do not mutate into budget-devouring bureaucratic monsters as soon as they are posted to the Joint Staff. But as we all know, Organization Man is only distantly related to *homo sapiens*, and will routinely do all sorts of things that he disapproves of as an individual human being.

Because we do need a unified brain for the different services, we cannot simply disband the Joint Staff. Nor should we seek to weaken it, thereby assuring greater civilian control only at the expense of being left with less effective planners. The only true remedy is to keep a very strong Joint Staff, but to balance it with the counterweight of equally assertive civilian leadership.

But that, of course, is now the problem, because, of all his different roles, Bill Clinton is least persuasive as our Commander-in-Chief. Elected in spite of having artfully evaded military service in a time of war, after a campaign in which he said as little as possible about the national defense other than the fact that he was for it, Clinton scarcely has a mandate to reform the Pentagon. The chances are, then, that he will be unable to reassert civilian control, and that this particularly perverse legacy of Vietnam will continue to deform our Constitution and incapacitate us in dealing with the post-cold-war world.

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The Degradation of the "New York Times"

Joseph Epstein

At 6:30 one morning in 1965 in Little Rock, Arkansas, the doorbell rang, waking me. There on the porch stood an older man, who, after announcing he was from Western Union, handed me a telegram. In my combined drowsiness and incipient panic, I neglected to tip him. My imagination of disaster told me that a telegram at 6:30 A.M. could only mean bad news: university degree rescinded; report to IRS with past seven years' receipts in hand; family wiped out in flood.

With nervous fingers, I pried open the telegram, which, if memory serves, read: "Can you give us 1,000 words on Alfred Kazin's 'Starting Out in the Thirties'? Book to follow. Review due four weeks from today." No fee was mentioned. It was signed by an editor of the *New York Times Book Review.* Calmed down, I later wired back that I would be pleased to comply. And pleased I genuinely was, for I was twenty-eight, trying to make a reputation as a writer, and it was after all the *New York Times* we were talking about, the august *New York Times.* How times—and the *Times*—have changed!

I have always remembered that that telegram arrived at 6:30 A.M., for it is precisely at that hour that I have for some years gone to my door in a Chicago suburb to pick up the national edition of the daily *Times,* which comes in a blue plastic wrapper. By this hour I have already had my breakfast, and I now set aside my serious reading and begin working my way through the *Times.* At the outside, I tend to give it half an hour, and nothing like the full "attention of perusal" which, among his readers, Henry James claimed he took for granted.

Increasingly in recent years, I read the paper, to twist a phrase of Coleridge's, in a state of almost entirely unwilling suspension of disbelief. Six mornings a week I read it with skepticism, deep suspicion, and mild anger among my reigning feelings. On the seventh morning, like the Lord, I rest and usually do not read the main news sections at all, though a friend supplies me with copies of the *Book Review,* the *Magazine,* and the "Arts & Leisure" section. Yet read it six days a week I continue to do, though more and more of late I have begun to ask myself why, and also whether life would not be better without it.

As a longtime reader, and occasional contributor, I—and not I alone—have also for a good while now been feeling the effects of yet another wave of radical changes in the *Times.* Once known as the paper of record, still the only newspaper in this country that has the status of a national daily—to a degree that neither the *Wall Street Journal* nor *USA Today,* for differing reasons, is quite able to manage—and hence the source and resource for much contemporary history, the *New York Times,* the good Gray Lady of American journalism, has of late in various ways been greatly tarted up, the better, it seems, to whore after the young, the rich, and the ignorant. One can practically hear, like the sound of mice behind the walls, the owners and editors of the *New York Times* madly scurrying about in the attempt to keep up with what they construe to be the spirit of the age.

After glimpsing the day's front page, the first thing I turn to in the *New York Times* are the obituaries: the only news that *stays* news, which is, I believe, Ezra Pound's definition of literature. Not that the obituaries are particularly well-written; for the most part, they are not so much written as compiled. But occasionally something amusing appears. Thus, in a recent obituary of the great Ray Arcel, trainer of so many of the boxers who unsuccessfully took on Joe Louis, the story was told that Louis once greeted Arcel at mid-ring before a fight by asking, "You heah again?" Sometimes patently political obits appear, as when, on January 17 of this year, the paper devoted much the greater part of its notice of Dr. Bernard Davis, of the Harvard Medical School, to the fact that he had opposed affirmative-action policies in admissions to medical schools. (The editors later apologized and ran a second obituary.) The grim procession of AIDS deaths marches past in these pages. Interesting to note, too, the amount of space the *Times* accords a public

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figure at his death, which one way or another often constitutes a political judgment on that person's life.

After the obits, I turn back, rather glumly, to the front page and begin to work forward. I say glumly not merely because in the nature of things the news of the world figures to be unhappy, but also because the *Times*'s coverage of that news seems to me less and less good than I remember it. And I remember it rather well, because in the early 1960's I worked for a small political magazine quite without resources, which not only counted on the *Times* for comprehensive coverage, especially of foreign affairs, but whose editors assumed—usually correctly—evenhandedness and accuracy in most *Times* reporting. Today the *Times* seems to me neither comprehensive nor evenhanded nor especially accurate.

The *Times* supplied a consistency of coverage in those days, and from all over the world. Now it seems to provide coverage only where crises occur or scandals arise. Reading the paper once gave a sense of contemporary history as an ongoing business and not, as now, the sense of a jittery emergency-room operation. Foreign governments' policies, cabinet posts, and national elections were covered from all over Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Indian subcontinent. (The recent movie *The Paper* mocks the old *New York Times* by having a character remark that it ran headlines like "Nepal Premier Won't Resign.") In those days, as an attentive reader of the *Times*, I could tell you the names of the heads of state of nearly every country in the world. Today, thanks to the *Times*'s greatly delimited coverage, I cannot even tell you the names of all the countries, let alone of their leaders. (C.D. Rom—Defense Minister of India, is he not?)

The *New York Times* is of course not alone in abandoning comprehensive coverage of hard international news. The *Times* of London, like that of New York, has pretty much given up the ghost on this front. Although I do not read them, I am told that the only newspapers that still attempt serious coverage are *Le Monde* in France, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in Switzerland, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* in Germany.

Nor did the famous *Times* coverage of foreign affairs prevent, in its day, some famously polluted coverage. One thinks of Walter Duranty, the *Times* correspondent in the Soviet Union in the 1920's and 30's, of whom Richard Pipes writes: "It has been said that no individual has done more to promote in the United States a favorable image of the Soviet Union at a time when it was suffering under the most savage tyranny known to man." On a smaller scale, so biased was the reporting of Herbert Matthews on Fidel Castro's "non-Marxist revolution" in Cuba that a joke had Castro saying, in imitation of an ad for the paper's classified section, "I got my job through the *New York Times*." Harrison Salisbury, one of the paper's most revered foreign correspondents and long known as a man who had never met a revolution he did not like, made Hanoi sound as if it would be the ideal place to take the kids for a month in the country, if not for American bombs.

In recent decades, the news columns of the *Times* have become so filled with opinion that one has become all but inured to the phenomenon. This probably began with the coverage of Vietnam. Certainly, during the Reagan years it was rare to pick up a piece about the economy without finding mention of what I came to think of as that musical-comedy team of Savage Cuts and Chilling Effects: every Reagan budget cut was savage, the effect of every cut chilling. Not that one should ever read a newspaper story without a proper measure of skepticism, but in the *New York Times* of late the gentle whir of political axes being ground has come to serve as a kind of *basso continuo* to the paper's reporting.

The main point, though, is that the news has never seemed so soft, not to say squishy, as it does now. True, when the *Times* does turn all its forces loose, it can be impressive on a major crisis like the Persian Gulf war—though television, with its up-to-the-minute coverage, easily beat out all print media during that particular event. Yet whole subjects, among them the labor unions, once the beat of A.H. Raskin, one of the *Times*'s stalwart reporters, currently seem to go without serious coverage. Many news stories are not about news at all, but instead about people's "perception"—always a dangerous word in the hands of a journalist—of the news: "So What Is This Whitewater? The People Speak (or Yawn)" ran a front-page story on March 12.

The supplanting of hard-news stories by feature stories (accompanied by a marked increase in the number of columnists being published) has gone very far. In the 1940's and 50's, Meyer Berger wrote a column, "About New York," which was the *Times*'s not very low bow in the direction of what used to be called human-interest stories. In the 60's, Gay Talese wrote notable feature stories, but his position, too, seemed anomalous. Today, feature writing is one of the surest routes to success on the paper. When Maureen Dowd, one of the star writers on the current staff, was transferred from New York to the Washington bureau, she is supposed to have remarked: "I know one thing: I'm not going to be covering any of those dreary regulatory agencies."

Large though its numbers are—in 1992, its daily circulation was 1.2 million, with 1.6 million sold on Sundays—the *Times* has in recent years felt its dominance much threatened: by *Newsday* in the Long Island suburbs and in New York and by the encroaching threat of an era dominated by television-watching and com-

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peting computer technology. The paper is evidently also much worried by the rise of the class now referred to as "aliterates," a term used to describe younger people who can read but would rather watch TV, diddle with their computers, go to the movies, and do lots of other things that do not require them to bother with the *New York Times*.

This is not the first time since the newspaper was acquired by Adolph S. Ochs in 1896 (for $75,000) that the *Times* has felt itself under the lash of social change. Hitherto, however, under successive Ochs-Sulzberger family publishers, the paper has preferred not to rush but to be dragged into the future. Only after years of discussion did it finally, in 1970, inaugurate an op-ed page. Only in 1976, when the change in its readership from metropolitan to suburban became evident, did the *Times* launch special weekend editions for New Jersey, Connecticut, Long Island, and Westchester; and it was in that same year, 1976, that the paper began its weekday "Living," "Home," and other special sections directed at suburban consumers and designed to stimulate further advertising, which they have succeeded in doing.

Such, under Arthur Hays Sulzberger (better known as Punch), the paper's publisher from 1963 to 1992, were some of the gradual and more self-evident changes in the *New York Times*. Many of them have now been chronicled in Edwin Diamond's *Behind the Times*,* a book that brings up to date the story of the paper since it was last told in 1969 in Gay Talese's *The Kingdom and the Power*.

Diamond is an energetic reporter who sets out to satisfy interest in the behind-the-scenes scuttlebutt of a powerful institution. His book is filled with statistics and useful quotations, some of which I have availed myself of here. But he is nonetheless an unattractive writer, chiefly because in this book he wants to have it both ways: to condemn the *Times* for making changes in what were once considered serious journalistic procedures and then to turn around and condemn the paper a second time for not going far enough. He seems not to have heard of "political correctness," nor noticed its advent in the (increasingly indistinguishable) news and feature columns of the *Times*.

One of Diamond's great villains—and he does tend to deal in starkly one-dimensional figures—is A.M. Rosenthal, executive editor of the *Times* from 1970 to 1986 (and now a regular columnist on the op-ed page). Rosenthal, for Diamond, is a conservative and an opportunist—a hustler, essentially, guilty of "effectively moving the *Times* to the Right," not to mention a misogynist, and a homophobe, and other of the imprecations people such as Diamond use to vilify those whom they consider less virtuous than themselves.

A very different picture of A.M. Rosenthal—more favorable and doubtless more accurate—emerges from John Corry's recent memoir, *My Times: Adventures in the News Trade*,† a book that winningly describes Corry's own years at the newspaper as well as the complications of his domestic life during this same period. At the *Times*, Corry worked first as a reporter on the metropolitan beat and then in the Washington bureau; finally, after departing for a stint of magazine journalism at *Harper's* during the years of Willie Morris's editorship, he returned to the *Times* as its television critic. From the latter perch, Corry wrote about the culture at large.

Among the stories he recounts covering for the *Times*, perhaps the most significant was the plot to discredit the Polish-American novelist Jerzy Kosinski by claiming he was a CIA agent who did not write his own books. Corry is open in his gratitude to Rosenthal and his deputy Arthur Gelb for backing him up when, as in this case, he produced writing that fell outside what had by then become the in-house party line at the *Times*—standard Left-liberal, with a dash of 60's radicalism added.

MY OWN, much more peripheral view of the Rosenthal era is somewhat different, if only because, unlike either Diamond or Corry, I tend to see the inner workings of the paper as opéra bouffe—an impression confirmed on the comically sad occasions during those years when I had dealings with various subeditors exhibiting all the signs of living in terror of their superiors. In any case, disappointing though the new *New York Times* is as compared with the paper under Rosenthal, it would in general be a mistake to assume some prelapsarian era in which every reporter was dedicated to truth, every critic deeply learned and serious, every columnist wise in thought and stylish in utterance.

When I began reading the *Times*, Arthur Krock, James Reston, and C.L. Sulzberger had political columns, and excruciatingly dull they were, too. The drama and music critics tended to be above the level of journeymen but still far from distinguished; and so, too, were the paper's art and architecture critics, with the exception of the tenure in those respective jobs of Hilton Kramer and Ada Louis Huxtable in the 1960's and 70's.

A typical issue of the *Times Magazine*, as Tom Wolfe once wittily pointed out, seemed to feature on its cover a water buffalo grazing in a rice field, as the come-on for a lead article with a title like "Asia Tackles Poverty"—inevitably, as it seemed in those days, written by Lady Barbara Ward. The *New York Times Book Review* was no great shakes, either, its chief task seeming to be that of providing, through the medium of its reviews, blurbs for books with commercial possibilities; the editor, a man named Francis Brown, much preferred

* Villard, 437 pp., $24.00.
† Grosset/Putnam, 240 pp., $24.95.

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reviews that he called "up" (for upbeat). Dwight Macdonald, with some justice, referred to the *Times*'s two regular daily reviewers, Orville Prescott and Charles Poore, as "the lead-dust twins."

Wherein lies the chief difference today? Whatever its shortcomings, the old *New York Times* took itself seriously in a way that, in comparison with the new *New York Times*, now seems most salutary—even noble in aspiration. Where the new *Times* feels it quite natural to have a piece entitled "Behind the Scene With a Rock Impresario" dominate the front page of the Sunday "Arts & Leisure" section, in the old *Times* the same spot might have been given over to, say, a Renoir retrospective. Like all good middlebrow institutions, the old *Times* felt duty-bound to educate and elevate its readers. The new *Times* aims no higher than entertainment and catching its readers up on popular culture. Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, Jr., the forty-two-year-old son of Punch Sulzberger and now the publisher of the *Times*, has gone on record as saying that people should read his newspaper "not only because it is the best newspaper in the world, but also for the fun of it."

WHICH brings us to the role of the publisher. It used to be a matter of some controversy whether publishers or their editors truly ran newspapers. In the old left-wing view, it was always the publisher who called the shots: with the ownership of the means of production, as the Marxists had it, went the real power. H.L. Mencken thought otherwise. His notion was that it was from their own wretched newspapers that publishers got most of their foolish ideas to begin with. Today perhaps they get them quite as much from their universities.

At the *New York Times*, as publishers, the Ochses and Sulzbergers were circumspect yet nonetheless firmly in control. The circumspection may in part have come from their being Jewish and not wanting to be seen as pushy. (Not until the accession of A.M. Rosenthal in 1970 was there a Jew at the top of the *Times*'s editorial masthead.) But this behind-the-scenes role began to change the further into his career Punch Sulzberger went. "I play a very active role in these things," he said of key editorial stands taken by his paper. "They don't go the other way if I don't want them to." His son appears determined to extend this activism, by taking a strong hand in hiring, newsroom management, and other day-to-day aspects of running the paper.

As his comment about "fun" suggests, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, Jr. is a man intent on saving his family's newspaper by softening it up still further. As he puts his mind to the task, the *Times* is in danger of becoming one of those newspapers that Joseph Conrad, in *The Secret Agent*, refers to as "written by fools to be read by imbeciles." For all that the old *Times* may have been stuffy and dull in its high pretensions, the new *Times* is thin and frivolous in its celebration of all that is new and young and with-it. It was after Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. took over from his father that the new gaudy "Styles" section was inaugurated, and it is under him, too, that there has occurred the notable increase in so-called "life-style" and other soft stories.

"It seems to me," wrote the English poet Philip Larkin, "that the apparatus for the creation and maintenance of celebrity is vastly in excess of the material fit to be celebrated." Nowhere does this seem truer than at the contemporary *New York Times*. The paper is dedicated to the creation of celebrity, not least among such tertiary figures in the arts as agents, movie producers, clothing designers, chefs, and journalists. Whether the subject is Tina Brown, the new editor of the *New Yorker*, or Bill T. Jones, an avant-garde choreographer and dancer ("HIV-positive son of migrant fieldworkers"), the coverage is not only entirely uncritical but generally gushing. Of Jones, a writer for the *Times Magazine* notes: "Onstage, Jones can be the embodiment of the expression 'in your face'; dissonant, edgy, and watchful, with an anger so profound he could not allay it even if he wanted to, which he decidedly does not." It is enough to make one miss the snooziferous Barbara Ward.

The standard present-day *Times Magazine* piece—the same thing shows up among the paper's columnists—is personal, confessional, slightly weepy. The perfect article of this sort would be about one's grief in the midst of one's success, one's doubts about almost everything but one's own ineluctable goodness, with the added piquancy of friends who are suffering or recently dead from AIDS.

Such an article actually appeared in the *Times Magazine* written by Frank Rich, the paper's former drama critic and now one of its regular op-ed page columnists. In this essay, "Exit the Critic," Rich speaks of his mother's taking him to the theater as "an unspoken consolation for the pain of her and my father's divorce"; of "dating" the woman who was to be his wife; of turning forty and discovering the theater to be "a world I had once seen as sophisticated [but that] no longer struck me as adult"; of his overwhelming grief at his mother's death in a car accident; of the death of Joseph Papp and of the latter's son's death (of AIDS). But in the end, not to worry, "death had been transfigured for me too, into something that looked very much like hope"—which is to say, Frank Rich had been given a column on the *Times*'s op-ed page.

UNDER the younger Sulzberger, too, the politics of the paper's editorials have similarly shifted. Whatever the politics of its reporters and feature writers, the politics of the old *Times* editorial page tended to be centrist

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liberal. In his book, Edwin Diamond, himself a man of the liberal Left, reminds his readers of the paper's tortured 1988 election editorial, entitled "Two Good Men," a 1,785-word ramble and shamble which, in its last sentence, finally came out for Michael Dukakis over George Bush. (Punch Sulzberger, who called this particular shot, was made nervous by Dan Quayle.) Earlier, in 1976, there was great intramural turmoil over the Democratic primary race for the U.S. Senate between Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Bella Abzug, with the publisher overruling John B. Oakes, his cousin and then editor of the editorial page, who wanted to go for Abzug.

It was once the traditional but unspoken belief of American liberals that, in any grouping of political views, they occupied the Center—or certainly would in any reasonable world. For better or worse, the *Times*, in past days, sought that Center in its editorials; because it is not always so easily located, the paper could at least on occasion take unexpected positions. No longer.

One can now predict how the *Times* will come out editorially on nearly every issue, problem, or question of the day. The only amusement, or instruction, is in watching its editorial writers squirm in defending the indefensible, or rationalizing the irrational. An editorial of January 12, 1994—about the large number of street beggars in New York—provides an example. "Begging and Giving" is the title; it might have been more accurately titled, "Still, Yet, But, and However." It ends thus:

> Panhandlers, especially those in enclosed spaces like subways, and many of the squeegee-wielders on street intersections can indeed be threatening, even dangerous. The public has a right to its peace of mind. But people also have a right to show compassion. So yes, T[ransit] A[uthority] police, discourage the panhandlers. But New Yorkers have every right to exercise their charitable instincts.
>
> It is cold out there.

Huh? What'd he say? How's that again?

As for its regular columnists, the *Times*'s op-ed page is currently dominated by various shades of liberalism: Russell Baker's soft liberalism; Anthony Lewis's old-fashioned anti-American liberalism; the standard contemporary liberalism of Bob Herbert, who is opposed to handguns, cigarette smoke, and race prejudice; the ready-to-rage feminist liberalism of Anna Quindlen; and the sensitive-guy cultural liberalism of Frank Rich. As a conservative, William Safire has for some years been the bastard at this particular family reunion. More recently, he has been joined by A. M. Rosenthal, who, in the current climate, is considered conservative if only because he is not a party-liner on such subjects as Israel, the third world, and street crime. Yet even Rosenthal, who comes closest on the op-ed page to embodying the tough workaday journalistic spirit, has to bite the bullet on occasion, as when, instead of using the term sob-sisters, he writes, without apparent irony, "sob-persons."

The daily op-ed page is filled out with two or three pieces by outside contributors. According to Edwin Diamond, something like a hundred such pieces come unsolicited into the *Times* every day (the paper also receives roughly 300 letters daily), and obviously no more than a small fraction of these is usable. Lots of people from the academy, from think tanks, from business and industry would do anything to get an op-ed piece in the *Times*, salivating at what they must think would be its immense influence.

The editors of the op-ed page do a fair amount of soliciting of material. My own name must appear on the Rolodex of one of these editors, who calls me every year or so for a piece. I once accommodated him by writing 750 words on the emptiness of the term "role model." For this I received a $150 fee and a letter from a professor of African-American studies in Pennsylvania offering to punch me out for my views. Such is the influence enjoyed by this contributor to the *Times* op-ed page. I have also been asked to write for the *Book Review* and the *Magazine*, and from time to time I have done so, but always with the feeling that my articles were sought as those of a curmudgeon or a somehow acceptable right-winger, to give the operation the appearance of intellectual openness. I am not sure that even that appearance is any longer sought.

OF COURSE, much of what happens at the *Times*, as in any large institution, happens less through conscious intention than through corporate cowardice, with added doses of inconsistency, internal incoherence, and incompetence. My dealings with the *Book Review* bear this out. I have had books of mine praised there, and books of mine blasted there (my considered opinion is, praised is better). In the days when I was asked to review fairly frequently, I noted that whenever I initiated a request, it was denied—more out of paranoia, I now realize, than of anything else. The assumption was that one must have had some secret motive in asking for a specific book. Like the Jewish-waiter joke whose punchline is, "You wanted the chicken soup, you should have ordered the borscht," so at the *Book Review*, "You wanted the Capote, you should have ordered the Mailer."

None of this contradicts the fact that the *Book Review* has come more and more to show the signs of a steady politicization—as John Ellis, in the magazine *Heterodoxy*, has recently been at some pains to document. But then the entire *Times* is politicized, if in a suitably up-to-date way. The politics of today's *Times* finds its strongest expression less in the traditional arenas of party and foreign and domestic policy than in those of culture and sensibility. (Not that the *Times* does

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not savor traditional political scandal. Even though most there probably voted for Bill Clinton, the *Times*'s editorial page and reporters have been ardent in their pursuit of him once his Whitewater troubles became evident. Journalists, after all, love nothing better than to kick a man when he is down.) But the true politics of the new *New York Times* are to be found at work on the issues of feminism, racism, homosexuality—usually funneled through the totem of "diversity," which, reinforced by political correctness, I prefer to think of as totalitarian pluralism.

In this respect, the *Times* has come more and more to resemble the contemporary university: out to achieve diversity, if need be, down the barrel of a gun. Enforced diversity creeps in everywhere. Thus, in the advertising column for March 17, the Chevrolet Division of General Motors is criticized because in its newest commercial, "nearly all the people having a good time . . . are white"; thus, Maureen Dowd, in a piece on photographs and drawings on the walls of Washington restaurants and watering holes:

> These heads are generally male, white, middle-aged (in spirit if not in years), and, at least judging from the fragments of torsos seen, decently suited. To be sure, the age of diversity has made its mark on the local delicatessen pictures; on these walls you can now find a black man or a white woman or even a black woman.

None of this is very surprising, for Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, Jr. is himself committed to totalitarian pluralism. In Edwin Diamond's book, he is quoted as declaring: "We can no longer offer our readers a predominantly white, straight, male vision of events and say we're doing our job." The way Sulzberger has backed up his conviction is not only through the writing he publishes but also through hiring and promotion practices inside the paper.

In 1989, the *Times* appointed a senior editor for minority recruitment, and "minority hire" is now a standard phrase around the newsroom. Diamond reports that "a dozen women moved into previously male-dominated positions in the news department." He also writes that "at the start of the 1992 presidential campaign, the *Times* named twelve people to high-profile assignments covering the candidates and politics. Six were women; three were African-Americans."

The sorts of people hired under such a strong diversity regime are likely to view the world from the standpoint of their ethnic origin or sexual orientation—as opposed to that now moribund "straight, male vision of events." And so, like the contemporary university, the pages of the *Times* increasingly wear the straitjacket of race, class, and gender.

No one in a position of power at the *New York Times* believes that there is any going back to the paper's old way of doing business. Warren Hoge, an assistant managing editor and clearly among the coming new men, has no compunction about saying that "we have to grab young readers by the lapels because they are less interested in reading." Hoge believes that the way to do this is with language and graphics that are potently up to the moment. The other, truer name for this procedure of jazzing up is "dumbing down."

There is, then, probably no hope of the *Times*'s turning away from the campaign for an artificial—because enforced—diversity. Whether the campaign will succeed in a business sense, by capturing that new audience of well-off, young non-readers for which the editors and publishers hanker—this, as an older generation of *Times* correspondents might have signed off their reports on one or another foreign revolution in progress, this "remains to be seen." In the meantime, the cost in intellectual distinction, even in the appearance of distinction, has been staggering. Through the 20th century the *New York Times*, for all its shortcomings, has been this country's greatest journalistic institution. The continuing degradation of that institution in the era of cultural decline we are now living through is far from pleasing to contemplate.

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Who Won Vietnam?

Charles Horner

IF, AS Ralph Waldo Emerson said, a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, then the study of statecraft will provide no end of confirming examples.

On February 5, two days after President Clinton announced in a White House ceremony that he would lift certain American trade restrictions against Vietnam, the front page of the *New York Times* carried a story in the upper-left-hand corner reporting on the favorable reception this news had received in the streets of Ho Chi Minh City (which some of us will persist in calling Saigon). By and large, the decision had also been well-received in the United States: there was some enthusiasm, perhaps more resignation, but outright opposition was slight.

On that same day, in the lower-right-hand corner of that same page, there was a story with the headline, "Despite Hurting Poor, U.S. to Seek Tougher Embargo Against Haiti." It went on to describe deteriorating conditions in Haiti, but a Clinton-administration official—an anonymous one, as such spokesmen tend to be when explaining contentious decisions—pointed out that Haitian authorities needed, nonetheless, to be disabused of the impression that American resolve was weakening. "This is," he said, "a signal that we are in this for the long haul."

It could be a long haul indeed. The present set of American trade restrictions on Vietnam dates from 1964 when the Democratic Republic of Vietnam—otherwise known as North Vietnam—became the object of American military operations in support of the then-independent Republic of Vietnam—or South Vietnam. The United States terminated its direct combat involvement by virtue of a peace agreement made in January 1973, and the last phase of the struggle ended when the South was overrun by the North Vietnamese army in April 1975. At that point American economic restrictions were extended to what became the newly combined and now renamed Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and—with the exception of the few just lifted by Clinton—they have remained in force to this day.

Actually, the widely-discussed embargo is an amalgam of executive orders and statutes assembled over three decades, few of which had Vietnam as their primary target. Still, Vietnam happens to be a "nonmarket economy country" within the ambit of the Trade Act of 1974 and must thus first conclude with us a trade agreement covering various items, including trademarks and patents. The agreement must then be approved by both houses of Congress. After that, Vietnam could become eligible for "most-favored-nation" (MFN) tariff treatment, without which Vietnamese goods would be at a prohibitive commercial disadvantage in the American market. But negotiations over all this must await the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, presumably in the cards, but not as yet agreed to.

There are still other requirements. For example, the renowned Jackson-Vanik amendment to the governing 1974 trade statute, originally oriented toward the old Soviet Union and its East European satellites and later to China as well, will require the President to certify that Vietnam is making progress toward free emigration before MFN can be granted. And then there are related provisions that would affect Vietnam's eligibility for credits guaranteed by the U.S. Export-Import Bank and the eligibility of American investors in Vietnam for guarantees from the federal government's Overseas Private Investment Corporation. For good measure, there is a 1993 statute that will have to be repealed outright, because it specifically prohibits any federally-guaranteed credits of American exports to Vietnam.

All these requirements for congressional action will certainly provide occasions for spirited debate about current practice and past policy—if someone wishes to make use of the opportunities. (In calling Vietnam "one of the world's worst police states," Lane Kirkland, the president of the AFL-CIO, may have signaled just such a wish.) In the meantime, the Department of the Treasury has lifted restrictions on the movement of funds between the United States and Vietnam, though some $250 million in Vietnamese assets will remain frozen here.

IF, THEN, these were once sanctions for the long haul, they are now only so much underbrush, sure to be cleared away in the near future. Indeed, much had already happened

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even before Clinton's announcement. At the end of 1991, his predecessor, George Bush, had allowed foreign-based subsidiaries of American corporations to negotiate with the Vietnamese, pending later permission to engage in business. And the American government had already stopped blocking loans to Vietnam from international financial institutions like the Asia Development Bank and the World Bank. These were responses to economic reforms the Vietnamese, politically isolated and economically bankrupt after the end of Soviet aid, had initiated in 1989.

Even more significantly, we had operated an office in Hanoi to coordinate efforts with the Vietnamese government in determining the fate of American military personnel still missing in action (MIA's). In time, U.S. Senators, high-ranking military officers on active duty, and a special presidential emissary—General John Vessey, retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—reported that the Vietnamese were cooperating on the MIA question.

This issue, the most emotional aspect of contemporary Vietnam policy, has had a long and complex, and occasionally even cynical, history of its own, but its power is still indisputable. It is the only issue to which President Clinton referred in his announcement of last February:

> From the beginning of my administration, I have said that any decisions about our relationships with Vietnam should be guided by one factor and one factor only—gaining the fullest possible accounting of our prisoners of war and our missing in action. . . . I have made the judgment that the best way to ensure cooperation from Vietnam and to continue getting the information Americans want on POW's and MIA's is to end the trade embargo.

Here the President was surely being high-minded, but perhaps also a bit disingenuous. For the lifting of the embargo had been preceded by a well-orchestrated campaign by the American business community promising that Vietnam would become another China, with comparably dizzying rates of economic growth and concomitantly great opportunities for American investment. And perhaps inspired by the "quick-reaction" air strikes made famous during the Vietnam war itself, our commercial expeditionary forces were primed to move almost immediately.

Thus, companies like IBM, General Electric, Philip Morris, and more than two dozen others had offices in Vietnam on the day Clinton acted. Reuters reported that only ten hours after the lifting of the embargo, American Express had reached an agreement with Vietnam's largest state-owned bank to facilitate acceptance of the Card throughout the country. It took only a little longer for the local Pepsico representative to install a giant inflated Pepsi can at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airport to attract the attention of the first passengers deplaning into the post-embargo era. But rival Coke was also set to go, having prepositioned bottling equipment in Singapore to transport back to Saigon at a moment's notice.

BACK in the 1960's, when the Vietnam war had become a bitterly divisive political issue, Senator George D. Aiken of Vermont gained his proverbial fifteen minutes of fame, and a peculiar form of immortality, too, by proposing Aiken's Formula to end the conflict: declare victory and leave. Since the fall of Saigon in 1975, the preferred formula has been the reverse: declare defeat and return. But the moments have been missed on both counts; in the 1960's it was too soon to claim victory, and today in the 1990's it is too late to embrace defeat.

The Carter administration (1977-80) represented mainstream "antiwar" opinion, and was no doubt relieved that it would not have Vietnam to contend with. In general, it had assumed that America's foreign-policy problems would become less pressing with the Vietnam war out of the way. Yet Southeast Asia remained a frustration. Carter had sought a rapprochement back in 1977, but the Vietnamese, confident in their prowess, did not think they had to make concessions. In particular, they insisted that the United States pay reparations. Though there were no doubt many on the political scene who would have welcomed this acknowledgment of America's "war guilt," it was not feasible politically.

Meanwhile, the new Vietnamese authorities were brutal in their reorganization of the South, and provoked a major refugee crisis in the late 1970's. The horrific fate of these so-called boat people scandalized the world, led to the convocation of international conferences and demarches, and caused the Vietnamese government to lose some of the support it had hitherto enjoyed among Western intellectuals and liberal politicians. By 1980, about 800,000 had fled or been expelled, as the Vietnamese government also turned on its citizens of Chinese descent following the marked deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations after 1978.

In adjacent Cambodia, the pro-American government in Phnom Penh fell in 1975 to the now-notorious Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot, who then carried out some of the most loathsome atrocities of the century; millions were murdered. The Khmer Rouge had once been allied with the Vietnamese Communists, but relations between the two began to deteriorate after their joint victories of 1975. In December 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia. In our understanding of it then, this represented one of several post-1975 advances for the Soviets. They had established themselves in Angola, in Northeast Africa, and in Aden, and were on the verge of doing so also on the Central American mainland.

Seen in this context, the latest instance of Vietnamese aggression came to be resisted by a re-

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gional and international coalition which included ourselves and the Chinese. Whatever the strategic calculation, the result was morally absurd, with the United States now supporting the Khmer Rouge as Cambodia's legitimate government, as against the Hanoi-backed "puppet regime" in Phnom Penh.

This gave rise to a bizarre ad-hoc coalition of "doves" who had opposed the pro-American regimes in both Saigon and Phnom Penh on ethical grounds, and "hawks" who had argued against having any truck with the vile Pol Pot for the same reason. One supposes that embarrassment at finding themselves yoked together removed the incentive for either group to make the truly horrible events in Cambodia into much of a domestic political issue; but in any case they certainly made any Vietnamese-American rapprochement impossible.

The civil war in Cambodia went on until 1991, little noticed, but no less cruel for that. The Vietnamese began troop withdrawals in 1989 as the Soviet Union's international position was crumbling, and the Cambodian civil war was suspended by an agreement brokered by the United Nations, which called for a new elected government. The infamous Pol Pot boycotted the elections and returned to the jungles, certainly not a good omen for the future of Cambodian comity. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia removed the other major obstacle to a new Vietnamese-American "dialogue."

It is a mark of the great transformation of Asia these past twenty years that the parties to the great Vietnam debate must now contend for claiming the credit, rather than for fixing the blame. As in the world at large, events have moved in our direction throughout Asia. What did American policy in Vietnam have to do with it?

The hawks had argued that a forced withdrawal from Vietnam would lead to a toppling of the famous "dominoes," to neutralism in Japan, to a major adverse shift in the global balance, and so on, but none of it happened. The doves, having campaigned mightily to characterize Vietnamese (and Cambodian) Communism as a benign, even progressive, phenomenon, were chagrined first by its awesome brutality and then, ultimately, by its pathetic ineffectuality at everything except political repression. Both sides would now agree, of course, that history records few victories as Pyrrhic as the triumph of the Vietnamese Communists in 1975, but they continue to dispute its cause. Has our current ability to begin reestablishing our position in Vietnam come about because of the war we fought there, or in spite of it?

It is the latter answer that can be detected behind the readiness of the current administration to let the Vietnamese so easily off the hook. After all, the President himself is an unrepentant dove, and his foreign-policy machinery is staffed with people who made their careers opposing the Vietnam war (and then lost them, for a while, by their failure to help President Carter deal with the war's aftermath).

Nor is it only in relation to Vietnam itself that the old antiwar ethos lives on. It can also be seen at work in such other moves as the recognition of the old pro-Soviet and pro-Cuban MPLA government in Angola; the demurral at administering the *coup de grâce* to the Castro regime in Havana; the campaign to install Jean-Bertrand Aristide—the 1990's successor to Nkrumah, Mugabe, Nyerere, and the other now-forgotten but once widely bruited hopes for the salvation of the third world—as President of Haiti. And with regard to more serious things, the persistence of the old ethos may help shed light on the grumpy, half-hearted, world-weary, and tepid tone of the Clinton administration's approach to the reconstruction of Russia and Central Europe.

Ironically, however—and much as it may wish to throw a lifeline, perhaps just for old times' sake, to an anachronistic regime whose total collapse would be too much to face for those who once expressed such high hopes for it—the White House, whether consciously or not, is now embarked on a campaign of massive destabilization of the Hanoi government. That government has made a mess of things these past nineteen years: not only has it failed to win over the millions of Vietnamese who opposed it before 1975; it has also made countless new enemies for itself. Current political dissent and human-rights protests throughout the country are but the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Despite the hundreds of thousands who have fled, and the tens of thousands who have been "reeducated," the remaining millions who were involved with and supported us when we were there have learned nothing to indicate that their support was misplaced.

Moreover, the Vietnamese diaspora outside the country, about 400,000 in the United States alone, is by itself a powerful subversive force. Some 100,000 overseas Vietnamese now return to visit each year, a necessary link in Vietnam's connection to the world economy, but one that will only exacerbate discontent with the regime among those still living under it. A new American "invasion," this time made up of entrepreneurs instead of soldiers, can only reinforce that discontent and thereby contribute to the further weakening of the Communist regime.

So it is that the old antiwar establishment now in power will in all likelihood finish the work of Johnson, Nixon, and all their backers.

Similarly, and again whether it knows it or not, the White House is now embarked on a campaign to resist the expansion of Chinese influence into Indochina. This particular aspect of our Vietnam policy in the old days was the one most cavalierly dismissed, but it is the one of the present day

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most frequently (if only quietly) acknowledged. The "Greater China" brought about by the success of China's post-1980's reforms is a pervasive concern throughout the region, and a desire among the Thais, the Indonesians, and all our other old friends in the vicinity that we go back to Vietnam is one reason why things have proceeded so smoothly. What we are pursuing here is a traditional balance-of-power objective, which people who have disdained balance-of-power diplomacy are now free to adopt through the comparatively genteel means of trade, educational exchange, tourism, and "dialogue."

IN THE end, the great turn of events in Asia and the world since 1975 may serve to deprive the Vietnam war of its political and, especially, its metaphorical, value. Which is to say that "Vietnam" may not always serve as shorthand for policy error of the worst sort.

"Their Vietnam"—that is what we tried to make of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. And it did eventually lead to the ruin of the Soviet Union, to the collapse of its empire, to the discrediting of its governing ideology. Even the Vietnamese themselves experienced "their Vietnam" in the invasion of Cambodia. Today's Vietnam is but a pale shadow of the country that used to boast of its successes in driving out the American invaders, as it now quite abjectly inveigles for their return.

Indeed, of all those who failed to learn the "lessons of Vietnam," the Hanoi regime and its Soviet patrons have surely been the most damaged: they read their favorable reviews in the American press and seem actually to have believed them.

We on our side seem to have done much better by our Vietnam. An interim assessment was offered back in 1985, when the then-Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, addressed a joint session of Congress. The United States, he said, had followed a consistent policy in Asia for 40 years, and the wars in Korea and Vietnam were necessary parts of it; as the preeminent power, the United States had "to settle and uphold the rules for orderly change and progress." The gap between the future prospects of the pro-Western states in Southeast Asia and the pro-Soviet Vietnamese had already opened. "Vietnam's attempt to carve out an empire for itself has resulted in its stagnation. . . . It is bogged down in a guerrilla war in Cambodia and will be worn down in a clash of wills on the Sino-Vietnamese border," Lee predicted.

In the meantime, he went on to note, economic progress in East and Southeast Asia was continuing apace and was causing the rest of the third world to rethink its policies. "Once infatuated with socialist economic policies of nationalization and autarky, third-world nations and their leaders have come to realize that stagnation and decay have followed these policies."

In Lee's part of the world, the most important convert was, of course, China, "once a ceaseless spoiler of other countries' plans as it undermined their stability through support to guerrilla insurgencies throughout Southeast Asia." But, Lee thought, it seemed that China had decided to end three decades of Maoist seclusion, give up the export of revolution, opt instead for an open door to trade and investment, and build its power in the world by those means.

It is now almost a decade since these observations, and today one could expand them to cover the ultimate demise of the Soviet Union itself. How, for example, did the 1988 Olympic games in Seoul or the accelerating boom in Southeast Asia affect Soviet officials and citizens who were exposed to them? Can we imagine that a Soviet elite—having grown unhappily accustomed to the idea of Moscow's backwardness vis-à-vis the great cities of Western Europe or the United States, and then having sullenly resigned itself to lagging behind contemporary Tokyo—could no longer abide a system which had made Moscow inferior even to the likes of Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur? Absolutely the last straw, one suspects, and a droll comeuppance to a Soviet Union that once felt it had much to gain from involvement in Indochina—where, as things turned out, it bet on the wrong horse.

But that bet was placed decades ago when neither hawk nor dove could imagine that America's road out of Vietnam and back into it would follow such a strange and improbable route, one that has now doubled back on itself, but with a still uncertain itinerary.

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Henry Roth's Secret

Hillel Halkin

THE association may seem an odd one, but the figure most immediately called to my mind by the career of the American novelist Henry Roth is T. E. Lawrence, the Lawrence of Arabia.

Although Lawrence died in a motorcycle crash at the age of forty-seven and Roth is now eighty-eight, each man was the author of a single remarkable book when young, the success of which neither of them ever repeated. In Lawrence's case this was *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, an account of the British-sponsored Arab guerrilla campaign against the Turks in World War I that is the finest work of English prose to have come out of that conflict. With Roth it was *Call It Sleep*, a novel about an immigrant family on New York's Lower East Side that is considered by many to be the greatest single work of American Jewish fiction. Published in 1934, *Call It Sleep* was praised by reviewers, eventually forgotten, and then quickly recognized as a classic when it was reissued as a best-selling paperback three decades later.

After the appearance of their first books, both Lawrence and Roth chose to live what appear to have been lives of penitential mortification—Lawrence as an enlisted soldier in the British Tank Corps and the RAF, Roth as a gauge-maker, poultry farmer, maple-syrup salesman, math tutor, and mental-hospital attendant in rural Maine. Although neither formally repudiated what he wrote, each had deep misgivings about it. Lawrence refused to accept royalties from the sales of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, calling this "part of my atonement for the crime of swindling the Arabs"; Roth has disparagingly spoken of *Call It Sleep* as "camouflage," and of David Schearl, its sympathetically depicted eight-year-old autobiographical hero, as having been in actual fact "a wicked little son of a bitch."

Both Lawrence's and Roth's self-disgust seems to have pertained to some "secret," a private wound that they chose to let fester rather than expose to the air and light of literary expression and clarification. With Lawrence, apart from reproaching himself for having concealed from his Bedouin comrades Great Britain's imperialist plans for the postwar Middle East, the guilt was apparently sexual—or more precisely, homosexual, involving his emotional and physical life during his desert campaign. As for Roth, he recently told an interviewer (Jonathan Rosen, writing in *Vanity Fair*) that, during the years he was working on *Call It Sleep* with the help of his lover and patron Eda Lou Walton, a woman considerably older than he,

> . . . his fragile sense of himself as an artist and a man was being overwhelmed. "I was really beginning to disintegrate," he recall[ed]. "There was a degeneration. She [Walton] was taking care of me. Then some other guy became interested and we lived in a kind of *ménage à trois* . . . he'd come in on weekends and the bed would be his. I'd sleep in the studio. Don't tell me that's normal. But I didn't have whatever . . . masculinity, or whatever you call it . . . to say "Nothing doing."

And the interview continues:

> "*Portnoy's Complaint*, by my namesake Philip Roth, is mild compared to my life," [said] Roth, hinting darkly at a sexual disintegration he refuse[d] to explain. He [would], however, confess, "I had become degenerate in my eyes. In my eyes homosexuality is degenerate."

IT IS true that the experiences hinted at here took place long after the childhood that Roth wrote about in *Call It Sleep*, and would seem to have no obvious bearing on the book's contents. And yet that *something* hitherto undisclosed does have such a bearing in Roth's opinion is made clear in his second novel, *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, Volume I of which, *A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park*, has now appeared*—"miraculously" has been the adverb most commonly used to describe this by reviewers—sixty years after *Call It Sleep*.

A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park picks up the story of David Schearl, now called Ira Stigman, and continues it to the end of World War I, when Ira is thirteen. As often happens to authors of great lyrical gifts as they advance in years, this book of Roth's old age is far more spartanly written than the novel of his youth, of the virtuosity of whose prose it has little. Yet in one respect, it is more complex, for it is composed of two different, interfaced planes: that of the narrative itself, and that of the author's reflections on the narrative, which are given us in the form of brief dialogues between him and his computer, nicknamed "Ecclesias."

In one of these, occurring about a third of the way through the book, we read:

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The time draws near. . . . Logey, and still under the spell of the mad dreams of last night, feverish and despairing, affected by the influence of the drug he [the over-eighty-year-old author] had taken in the early morning to ease the extreme pain of R[heumatoid] A[rthritis], he was loath to proceed. But more than all that, because the time drew near.

.....

But that was a year later [says Ecclesias]. You were twelve.

Indeed. That was in 1918.

And you're speaking of the year before, 1917.

Just before the United States entered the war. Yes.

But the crucial point or moment was 1918.

Yes.

Then why not let it wait?

Why not indeed.

You'll sooner or later have to get over that hurdle.

Yes.

I told you at the outset, when you deliberately omitted that most crucial element in your account, that you would not be able to avoid reckoning with it.

You did, Ecclesias. Perhaps I wasn't ready for it.

And you are now?

Yes. I became so.

When you had to. It finally became inescapable.

Yes. Face-to-face with it as a consequence of continuing. Which is something, you notice, Ecclesias, I managed to evade in the only novel I ever wrote: coming to grips with it.

It was adroit. You made a climax of evasion, an apocalypse out of your refusal to go on, an apocalyptic *tour de force* at the price of renouncing a literary future. As pyrotechnics, it was commendable, it found favor, at any rate. Proceed.

By "pyrotechnics," Roth is being figurative and literal at once, since he is referring both to the intricate verbal cadenza of *Call It Sleep*'s final pages and to the climactic event orchestrated by it: David Schearl's near electrocution, in a shower of fireworks, by the third rail of a New York City trolley line. This scene—which is "apocalyptic" not so much because of David's close brush with death as because it is accompanied by a religious fantasy on his part in which the power-charged rail represents a terrifying revelation of God—has been justly acclaimed as a brilliant denouement to a superbly accomplished novel. Yet here is Roth telling us that it was not only a lie, but one that caused him decades of writer's block! There cannot be many cases in literary history of an author so cynically dismissive of the critics ("it found favor, at any rate") for being so lavishly appreciative of him.

But what is the lie or "evasion" that, undetected by his readers, Roth accuses himself of perpetrating in *Call It Sleep* by ending the novel—quite literally—with a *deus ex machina* instead of continuing David Schearl's story? While *Mercy of a Rude Stream* is by its own testimony a belated attempt to make amends for this failure, Roth is never explicit about its nature. There are only hints, our understanding of which will no doubt be revised as additional volumes of the novel—four more are said to exist—follow Part I.

THE first of these hints, which occurs in the narrative section directly following Ecclesias's call for a "reckoning," tells of a near-incestuous occurrence when Ira is twelve. In *Call It Sleep*, a novel that revolves around the Oedipal triangle between a boy, his lovingly protective mother to whom he overdependently clings, and his cold, abusive father of whom he lives in fear, David Schearl is a prepubescent on the cloudy verge of a sexual understanding that eludes him. Ira, on the other hand, although he too has a shaky grasp of the facts of life, knows about *lyupka*, the Polish word for "love" picked up from his mother that is his private term for sex. One night he lies thinking about it in her bed, in which he has been invited to sleep while his father is out of town:

> . . . That was *lyupka*. That was why Pop had given him that awful licking with the butt of the horsewhip because he and the other kids had played bad with the little girls on Henry Street where they lived, because their mother complained they played bad. "*Genuk! Shoyn genuk!*" Enough! . . . What blue stripes Ira had on his back afterward. So . . . that was it, *lyupka*. He could see Mom still on the screen of closed eyelids, but he was falling asleep. . . .
>
> And awoke—to his horror! He was playing bad against Mom's naked legs, lying on his side and pushing, rubbing, squeezing his stiff peg between Mom's thighs. She woke up.
>
> "I didn't mean it!" Ira wailed in his shame. "I was dreaming—"
>
> She laughed indulgently. "Go back to sleep."
>
> He rolled quickly away, and still panting, lay with his back to her as far away as he could. What was that bliss that seemed about to well over? That drove him, made him do that to Mom in a dream . . . just a little more it would have, it wanted to: *lyupka*.

Is this, then—or whatever feelings and events in the young Henry Roth's life this scene is a fictional dramatization of—the "crucial element" which Roth blames himself for "evading" with the staged theophany of *Call It Sleep*'s end? The answer is apparently yes and no, for it is only part of a larger constellation. Indeed, the next dialogue with Ecclesias, which comes immediately after this passage, suggests that Roth is talking about not one but a number of mysteriously related chapters in his life:

I foresaw you'd have difficulties.

It wasn't difficult to foresee.

Shall I waft you into the future a quarter-century hence aboard a freight train bound east?

I cry you mercy, Ecclesias.

What will you do?

Do without.

Chugga. Chugga. Chugga. Whe-e-e! The whistle at the crossing. Dark is the night over Texas. And cold. And stars thick as traprock come tumbling out of the moonless heaven.

Yeah. But *Procul O, procul este, por favor.*

Translating the last line is not a great help, since it simply means "Be far away, please" in mixed Latin and Spanish. And as if this were not puzzling enough, toward

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the end of *A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park*, after a description of another traumatic incident in Ira's early adolescence, one in which his homosexual eighth-grade teacher Mr. Lennard tries to engage him in an act of mutual masturbation, Roth and Ecclesias discuss why Ira did not report the matter to his parents in the following terms:

> It was because you already felt guilty, wasn't that the chief reason?
>
> Yes, because I might betray something even more heinous than Lennard's molestation.
>
> Isn't it time you cleared the air, exposed the clandestine burden? You can't go on indefinitely in this fashion, with an unaccountably eccentric orbit, like a visible astral body with an invisible satellite. Besides, the enigma is beginning to wear thin.
>
> Very well. Soon.

Yet all that happens "soon" is that *A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park* comes to an end with the enigma still intact. Nothing more is revealed about Ira's life that might explain it, and while Roth and Ecclesias conduct several more conversations, none of these "clears the air" around the "clandestine burden."

WHAT are we to make of all this? Like a detective who lacks enough clues to solve the case he is working on, we can only marshal the incomplete evidence, add a few surmises, and await further enlightenment. So far, we either know or can infer that:

1. Henry Roth believes that *Call It Sleep* was dishonest because it refused to come to grips with key experiences and emotional conflicts which, going back to his childhood and early adolescence, permanently affected and warped his character and adult behavior;

2. These experiences and conflicts largely had to do with Oedipal feelings, incestuous promptings, and homosexuality;

3. Although he has in the past blamed his inability to write anything substantial after *Call It Sleep* on his long association with the American Communist party, the ideological demands of which supposedly stultified his creativity, Roth's new novel implies that this may be putting the cart before the horse. While Communism, which Ira is still too young to be attracted to, is only marginally referred to in *A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park* as the political outlook of one of his uncles, the novel prepares us for the possibility that it too was but a flight from Roth's psychological problems, which would have kept him from writing even had he never been a party activist;

4. While it is too early to tell whether this represents a literary stratagem, an aged man's quasi-deathbed confession, or both, the tension between the author's desire to bare his breast and the inhibitions that stand in his way will apparently continue to run through at least some of the remaining volumes of *Mercy of a Rude Stream*.

It is curious that, in the reviews that I have seen of *A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park*, all of which have treated Roth's new novel as an extraordinary publishing event but a literary disappointment, almost no attention has been paid to this aspect of it.

Nor is this true only of superficially written notices like Paul Gray's in *Time* Magazine ("Ira's way—and Roth's as well—takes the reader through a pretty grim, no-frills narrative. . . . Memories of his past have obviously obsessed Roth for most of his adult life, but he no longer seems willing—as he did so memorably in *Call It Sleep*—to let his readers experience and savor them firsthand"). It is equally the case with more thoughtful criticisms, such as Robert Alter's in the *New York Times Book Review* ("The Oedipal triangle of *Call It Sleep* is still present in the new novel, but it is not permitted to become an electrified zone from which to view the world startlingly enlarged to the proportions of myth. Even a moment of inadvertent sexual arousal when the boy is sharing his mother's bed while the father is off on a trip is presented not as a cataclysmic event but rather as a kind of hormonal ambush. . ."). What Alter overlooks no less than Gray is Roth's determination, having once betrayed the truth precisely by surrendering to the literary temptation to mythicize, not to do it again.

OF COURSE, the relationship of literary to biographical "truth" is never straightforward, and it is perhaps even the rule that the first is always achieved at the expense of the second. In this respect, Roth's compunctions may seem naive, and the critics' assessment of his work more trustworthy than his own. Nor is this the only barrier to our taking seriously the central premise of *Mercy of a Rude Stream*—i.e., that it is in some sense a work of expiation. An additional difficulty is Roth's attitude toward homosexuality, which is sharply opposed to that of contemporary liberal culture.

"Homosexuality is degenerate," Roth has said, and there is more than one indication in *A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park* that future volumes of *Mercy of a Rude Stream* will deal with the drama of the author's moral fall and rescue by his marriage to Muriel Parker (called "M" in the novel), a talented musician with whom he had two children and lived for 51 years until her death in 1990. It was through M, Roth tells Ecclesias, speaking of himself in the third person, that "he had achieved his regeneration, such as it was, attained an improved adulthood—what to say?—an image of a self more acceptable, a less repugnant reality."

In an age in which it is passé to regard homosexuality even as a maladjustment, such an attitude may strike Roth's audience as embarrassingly benighted, and his castigation of himself for homosexual episodes in his own life as a form of moral hypochondria. Yet though final judgment will have to be reserved, it seems safe to say even on the basis of *A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park* that homosexuality for Roth is not only, or even predominantly, what is known today as a "sexual preference." It is above all (as perhaps it always has been among most men everywhere) a metaphor for the abased condition of whoever has surrendered his manhood by let-

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ting it be violated psychologically and physically. T.E. Lawrence, himself a case study in degeneration who ascribed "irrevocably losing the citadel of my integrity" to his rape while a prisoner by Turkish soldiers, would have had no trouble understanding this.

The real miracle of *Mercy of a Rude Stream* may thus turn out to be its story of the regaining of the citadel, including—here, too, there are advance confidings to Ecclesias in *A Star Shines Over Mt. Morris Park*—Roth's return after the better part of a lifetime to an identification with Israel and the Jewish people. (Under the impact of the Six-Day War in 1967, Roth renounced his Communist party-line hostility to Zionism and became an almost ferocious supporter of Israel; in his new novel, he fantasizes going to live on a kibbutz where "I would know chiefly hard work, rigor, danger, but also kinship, precious kinship, dignity.")

Needless to say, such a structure would be mythic itself—would in fact hark back to one of the oldest of human myths, that of sin, atonement, and redemption—and would suggest that, wherever there is literature, myth will follow. Or as Roth tells Ecclesias, speaking of the pursuit of writing fiction: "The thing's a fake anyway, [although] I don't mean in the sense of a deliberate deception." Perhaps this is the closest he has yet come to an exoneration of *Call It Sleep*.

Why the New Workfare Won't Work

Neil Gilbert

ALMOST everyone agrees that work must replace welfare. Following President Clinton's lead, both Democrats and Republicans have embraced the idea of a two-year limit on welfare, during which recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) would be given education, training, child care, and job-placement services. Afterward, when entering the labor force, they would continue to qualify for transitional services like Medicaid and child care during the first year of employment, as is currently the case under the Family Support Act.

This approach is a variation on workfare experiments that have disappointed policy-makers since the 1967 work-incentive program. Although the reforms now in fashion are more stringent in their demands, and more generous in their incentives, they are no more likely to succeed than earlier schemes.

The ultimate question is: what happens to welfare recipients who follow the program, but are unable to secure employment after the two years? According to current thinking, they should be required to participate in some form of public-works program established by the state. This is a tough-sounding quick fix that will surely create more problems than it solves. For those who have not found a job after two years are likely to include many AFDC mothers who are among the least skilled and least motivated in the welfare population. The social and economic costs of employing them in public works will be staggering.

Thus, estimates by the Congressional Budget Office indicate that expenditures for on-the-job supervision of these workers and day care for their children would amount to $6,300 per participant. With the average AFDC grant already about $5,000, participation in mandatory work programs would hence more than double the costs for each welfare recipient. Smoke-and-mirrors proposals to finance this plan through taxing food stamps and cutting other welfare benefits suggest just how desperate the administration is becoming as it starts to calculate the costs of public works. And beyond fiscal concerns, the cynicism and demoralization bred by make-work would surely undermine the already shaky standards of public bureaucracies.

Other aspects of the current thinking on welfare reform are also hardly likely to go according to plan. In particular, proposals for reform organized around incentives to work and a two-year limit on public support are plagued by three problems: they ignore success; they create perverse effects; and they require a level of callousness that social-agency personnel are unlikely to countenance.

FOR many families, AFDC serves not as a poverty trap, but as a temporary support in hard times; in fact, about 48 percent of all AFDC spells last less than two years. True,

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this success rate can be somewhat misleading, since one-third of short-term cases will enroll in AFDC again some time in the future and, in any event, most AFDC costs are attributable to long-term recipients. Nevertheless, reform measures that ignore the substantial number of successful cases are only likely to increase program expenses still further. By providing various transitional services and other incentives to work, they will raise the costs of public support for families who previously, in the absence of these benefits, would have left the rolls.

At the same time, if incentives are high enough, they may perversely encourage those who are already in low-paying occupations to leave work for AFDC, and then recycle back into the labor force in order to qualify for the transitional benefits.

Finally, for those welfare recipients who refuse to participate in either training or public works, how are public agencies to enforce mandatory work requirements? Answers to this question are harsh and unsatisfactory. The Republican Task Force on Welfare Reform, for example, would impose sanctions on those who fail to participate by initially reducing the family's AFDC grant and food-stamp benefits by 25 percent, and after six months dropping them from AFDC altogether. But proposals of this sort disregard the question of what will happen to the children on welfare, for whom the AFDC program was originally devised.

Whatever hard lines policy-makers may draw, moreover, workers in welfare agencies are unlikely to impose sanctions that would virtually drive families with children onto the street. And if these sanctions *were* enacted, one may confidently predict that the two-year limit would become to welfare in the 1990's what deinstitutionalization was to mental illness in the 1960's, the deferred costs of which now plague our cities.

The essential problem with the transitional-incentives and time-limits approach to welfare reform is that it deals too generously with those recipients who are most competent and motivated, and too harshly with those who are least competent and motivated. I would suggest an alternative—one that begins with the need to distinguish among AFDC families, and seeks to ensure the well-being of children.

FAMILIES enter the AFDC program for different reasons and remain on the rolls for varying periods of time. About 60 percent of AFDC spells begin because of either a decline in family earnings or a divorce (or separation) of married couples with children. I would argue that these cases should be treated differently from the 30 percent of AFDC spells that begin when an unmarried woman has a child.

The reason is simple. Welfare applicants who were married or employed for some period of time prior to enrollment in AFDC are generally independent citizens who had been abiding by social conventions and trying to follow the rules. It is reasonable to presume that they are competent and motivated to become self-sufficient. Thus, they should be considered a separate group, awarded AFDC benefits, and left alone for two years to reorganize their lives. A high proportion of them will be among the 48 percent of recipients who leave the welfare rolls of their own volition in less than two years. Those remaining on AFDC after two years could then be enrolled in the first phase of intervention, leading to what might be termed "managed dependency."

As for women who enter the AFDC program because of out-of-wedlock births, they are another matter. For one thing, they are younger and more likely to become long-term recipients than those in the other group. For another thing, their children are at great risk of harm. Children in single-parent families are twice as likely to be abused as those in households where both parents are present; when the single parent is a teenager, the risk is even higher. This group should be targeted for special intervention, if for no other reason than to protect the children.

Instead of forced labor and make-work schemes, however, the intervention would be divided into two phases. In the first, practical assistance would be offered to mothers and protection would be provided for their children by means of regular home-health visits, assistance in home management, encouragement of school drop-outs to complete their high-school requirements, and development of systematic plans for re-integration into the labor force.

After three years, those still on AFDC would enter the second phase. Here, greater social controls would be employed, reflecting the recipients' emerging status as "wards of the state." Home visiting to supervise child-care practices would continue, and the level of public-assistance grants would remain the same. But during this phase, a case manager would be assigned to exercise increased regulation over each family's financial affairs, which would entail payment of rent and utilities and weekly allocations of food stamps. There would also be increased monitoring of outside resources available to recipients, which would reduce their AFDC grants.

Tightening social control through case managers and home-health visitors would certainly raise the costs of AFDC. But this would still be a relatively inexpensive way for society to protect vulnerable children, while giving notice that long-term public dependence would be accompanied by greater public surveillance. Increasing the role of public authority in recipients' lives would make welfare less attractive to some who might otherwise be employed.

THIS is a modest goal, but those who demand more would do well to recognize that tinkering with AFDC is not the answer. Although AFDC may help to sustain the never-married, single-parent culture of poverty, it did not create this unhealthy pattern of behavior, and forces larger than those generated by welfare reform will be required to eliminate it.

Indeed, a serious effort to reduce welfare must go well beyond adjustments in the AFDC program.

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The best and fairest incentive would be to increase the work-related benefits of low-paying jobs of the kind that many welfare recipients might perform. Progress along these lines is already under way with the expansion of tax-based social transfers, such as the earned income-tax credit. Working families also need the security of medical protection, which those on welfare receive through Medicaid. Finally, there is widespread agreement that absent fathers should be held responsible for the financial support of their children (though resources for such support is often quite limited among fathers of children in the AFDC population).

Even with all this, dependency will not disappear. Whether due to personal deficiencies or forces beyond their control, people in need of care will always be with us. At the very least, however, social policies aimed at alleviating dependency should not condemn children for the hard luck or personal frailties of their parents.

Movies

Enter the Chinese

Richard Grenier

THE word "Chinese" has recently acquired an odd dissonance in the movie world. Films of extraordinary quality, made in mainland China, have been nominated in America for Academy Awards and in Europe have carried off top prizes at the Cannes, Venice, and Berlin film festivals (the big three). Indeed, China has now completely usurped the place of Japan as the most prestigious filmmaker in the Far East. At the same time, films made by Chinese-American directors, and dealing with Chinese-American subject matter, have reached a level of truly stunning mediocrity. The most recent example is *The Joy Luck Club*, so sentimental and so lachrymose that it has conquered a "crossover" white female audience which appears to have been silently waiting for a return of the 1930's "woman's" movie.

Produced by Oliver Stone (*Platoon*, *JFK*), who with his appalling new Saigon-based *Heaven and Earth* gives evidence of considering himself a qualified expert on things Asian, *The Joy Luck Club* is the story of four young Chinese-American women who meet once a week to play mah-jongg with their mothers, all of whom are immigrants born in China. Faithfully adapted from Amy Tan's best-selling novel, and directed by Hong Kong-born Wayne Wang (*Chan Is Missing*), *The Joy Luck Club* gives us, one by one, the soap-opera lives of each of the four young women, and even more so the grandiose, decade-spanning, intercontinental soap-opera lives of each of the four mothers: truly global soap.

All the older women in this movie have suffered as only women suffer, and all sacrifice greatly so that their daughters may attain happiness. We witness suffering from the depredations of war, suffering from the depredations of men, the yearning of mother for daughter, and of daughter for mother—altogether, eight tales of love, longing, loss, sacrifice, abandonment, infanticide, and high intergenerational emotion.

At the film's conclusion, one of our four young ladies makes a climactic trip to China, and on the dock in Shanghai achieves an ultimate reunion with her two long-lost Chinese sisters. Commenting on this scene, *Variety* predicted that it would "leave millions teary-eyed at the powerful if sentimental fadeout." And, lo, it has come to pass. Millions have been shallowly moved. Millions have been left teary-eyed. Having surpassed the box-office returns of both Jane Campion's modish *The Piano* and Martin Scorsese's remarkable filming of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, *The Joy Luck Club* in March seemed to be gaining even on *Wayne's World 2*.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, more white Americans have seen more Asian-Americans in a movie than at any time since MGM's 1937 version of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, starring Luise Rainer and Paul Muni. Only this time, the

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characters are played by real Asians. So I suppose that whatever else one may say of it, *The Joy Luck Club* is a historic event of a sort.

MEANWHILE, the real China has been witnessing historic cinematographic events of a rather different order. In 1966, Mao's Cultural Revolution, out of hatred for the country's educated class and traditional Chinese art, closed the Beijing Film Academy after it had graduated only four classes. Two years after Mao's death it was reopened, and received thousands of applications from young Chinese. In 1982, after a sixteen-year hiatus, the Academy graduated its fifth class, whose members became the founding fathers of the new Chinese cinema—which soon styled itself the "Fifth Generation."

In his "Origins of the New Chinese Cinema" (in *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, distributed by Indiana University Press), Tony Rayns writes: "What makes the Fifth Generation different from earlier generations in the Communist Chinese cinema? The short answer is: the life stories of its directors."

These directors were all born after 1949 and the Communist victory in the civil war, and had no firsthand experience of the old regime. All were from the educated upper class, and were little inclined to accept at face value crude propagandistic simplicities. Under the Cultural Revolution, they were all subjected to the public humiliation of being compelled to denounce their educated parents and teachers as enemies of the Chinese people. This, I am told, is a humiliation one does not forget. As members of the educated class, the future Fifth Generation directors were sentenced to years of manual labor, often in remote areas of the countryside, to "learn from the people."

The only "culture" to which these young men were exposed in their adolescence was the endless monotony of idiot-simple didactic movies, theater, and fiction, and of course the sacred *Thoughts of Chairman Mao*. Even in the preceding period, an impoverished Asian version of Soviet "socialist realism" had held the field, with China producing such bombastic and stultifying films as *The Red Battalion of Women* and *The Girl With White Hair*.

When Mao died and the Gang of Four fell, Chinese cinema did not improve immediately. The hack Soviet-style filmmakers' idea of a daring new movie was *Love and Inheritance*, about the daughter of the head of an ophthalmology institute who forgives her boyfriend's earlier actions as a Red Guard and realizes that her dedication to medicine need not preclude a more universal idealism.

So China was really waiting for the Fifth Generation. Asked recently what films have influenced him most, director Zhang Yimou, the Fifth Generation's young giant (China's Akira Kurosawa, if you will), answered with no hesitation: the "really dreadful" movies made in China in the 1960's and 1970's. "When we were in film school," he said, "we swore to each other we would never make films like that."

OF THE many extraordinary films produced by the Fifth Generation, some have not been widely seen in the West. Wu Ziniu's *The Last Day of Winter* shows for the first time China's gulag, a vast prison labor-camp in the northwestern desert. Chen Kaige's seminal *The Yellow Earth* (with Zhang Yimou as co-author and cinematographer) examines skeptically one of the most cherished of Chinese Communist mythic events, the 1930's enlightenment of backward village communities by the "People's Army." Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Horse Thief* and *On the Hunting Ground* are devoted to the lives of national minorities in Tibet and Inner Mongolia, previously presented as decidedly retarded in comparison with the Han Chinese.

Although such films clearly have a point of view, the most powerful underlying characteristic of all the Fifth Generation movies is that they do not preach. Having been burned, first, by Soviet-style socialist realism, and, second and even more severely, by the Cultural Revolution, Fifth Generation directors seem quite allergic to didacticism. Their films do not contain a *raisonneur*, nor does one hear anywhere else the voice of the author explaining everything. The Fifth Generation trusts the story to tell itself. Consequently, as with major literary works, people often come away from Fifth Generation movies with differing impressions.

The attitude of the Chinese authorities toward these young filmmakers was and remains ambivalent. Although Beijing still describes itself as practicing "socialism with Chinese characteristics," it has permitted many of the most important Fifth Generation movies to be financed in whole or in part by capitalist money from Hong Kong or Taiwan (unthinkable in the past). Taiwan in particular has developed a raging case of what the Taiwanese themselves call "mainland fever," a fascination with their Chinese past.

But the Beijing censor still hovers. Major films have been banned and unbanned, then banned and unbanned again—much as political dissidents are released from prison, rearrested, then released again. In particular it seems permissible to denigrate the Cultural Revolution, but with moderation, as long as one does not make it appear *too* vile.

Thus, of the two movies I am about to discuss in depth, one, *Farewell My Concubine*, which shared the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival with *The Piano* and is now a hit on the U.S. art-movie circuit, was screened by Deng Xiaoping himself. He appeared to give his permission to release the film after the pruning of sensitive passages—but the decision was then reversed (the film was banned), and then reversed again (the film was released but only after further pruning).

Similarly with another movie, *Ju Dou*, directed by Zhang Yimou. In China this film was banned because its most repellent character is a sadistic old man who beats his beautiful young wife. Viewed in an "Aesopian" manner (i.e., as allegory), the film seems a condemnation of China's elderly leadership. Anomalously, however, while banning the movie in China, the authorities allowed it to circle the globe, winning prizes abroad and

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playing to high praise and substantial commmercial success.

Farewell My Concubine, not the best of the Fifth Generation movies, takes its name from a celebrated Chinese opera in which the emperor and his favorite concubine are deeply in love; in the final act of the opera, after much stylized Chinese singing, the devoted concubine, her defeated emperor having been sentenced to death, commits a highly theatrical suicide. As is the case in classical Chinese opera, the concubine is played by a man.

Neatly enough, our film, based on a best-selling book by the Hong Kong novelist and journalist Lilian Lee and directed by forty-one-year-old Chen Kaige, tells the story of two young orphans trained from childhood for caste-like careers in Chinese opera. Of course they grow up to play the emperor and his concubine in the eponymous opera. The movie follows the lives of these two orphans, Dieyi and Xiaolou, beginning with their acceptance as children at the opera school in China's warlord period. It continues through the Japanese invasion, the Chinese civil war, the triumph of Communism, and then some very hard times indeed brought about by the Cultural Revolution.

Even as a child, Dieyi, more frail and thought to be more effeminate, is forced into female roles. Beating seems to be a large part of the training. (But there is also Dieyi's mother, a prostitute who cannot afford to keep her son and, when he is refused admittance to the opera school because he has a sixth finger, promptly whacks it off.) Life gets even harder when, after the orphans have grown up to be stars of Beijing Opera, Dieyi, a homosexual, wants to be Xiaolou's concubine in real life as well as on the stage and is driven wild with jealousy when Xiaolou marries a beautiful prostitute (played by China's leading film star, Gong Li).

Then comes the Cultural Revolution. Both Dieyi and Xiaolou, practitioners of an "aristocratic" art, are dragged through the streets by Red Guards and severely beaten. In a grandiose scene they are forced to perform ritual self-criticism, confess to imaginary crimes, and hysterically denounce each other. Then both are sent off to learn how authentic and beautiful life can be by working with their hands in a labor camp. Eventually the regime softens and they return to Beijing and their former eminence.

The movie's final scene takes place in 1977, after Mao's death and the fall of the Gang of Four, with the Cultural Revolution finally at an end. The two actors—in full costume, one as the defeated emperor, the other as his devoted concubine—face each other in an empty rehearsal hall. As the music swells, Dieyi commits a theatrical suicide, even after the manner of the concubine he has spent his life playing. Xiaolou is stricken, even as the emperor was stricken.

But why the suicide? Why should Dieyi so regret the end of the Cultural Revolution under which he (and China) suffered so much? Lilian Lee's novel ends quite differently. Dieyi and Xiaolou, both refugees now in Hong Kong, elderly men by this time and having lived through rather a lot together, meet by chance in the street. Almost strangers, they exchange a few words, then each goes his separate way. Although the movie is beautifully photographed, costumed, and acted, with exotic Chinese color galore, the ending is theatrical and senseless.

This is characteristic of director Chen Kaige, who has done a stint at NYU's film school and knows his way around American show business. Again and again in *Farewell My Concubine* he goes for grandiose spectacle, repeatedly arranging chronological coincidences among events of the opera, events in the private lives of his characters, and the great events which have overtaken China in his lifetime. The result is an overwrought movie given to empty dramatic effects. (As J. Hoberman put it in the *Village Voice*, *Farewell My Concubine* represents "the second coming of Irving Thalberg"—in my view, a realistic assessment.) It is a pity that this is the only Fifth Generation film currently in general release in the United States.

THE grand master of the new Chinese cinema is not Chen Kaige but Zhang Yimou, forty-two, who, having lost ten years of his life to the Cultural Revolution, is now considered to have directed in five years no fewer than four masterpieces: *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, and, most recently, *The Story of Qiu-Ju*.

Zhang's first film, *Red Sorghum* (based on still another novel, this one published not in Hong Kong but in Taiwan), is set in the savage, bandit-ridden Chinese northeast during the warlord period in the 1920's. It won the Golden Bear in Berlin (the top award), an achievement much written about in China—where the film was also a great commercial success. His second movie, *Ju Dou*, nominated for Best Foreign Film at Hollywood's Academy Awards, was Zhang's "anti-gerontocracy" film, and, as I have mentioned above, it was banned in China for years.

Raise the Red Lantern, which like *Red Sorghum* and *Ju Dou* also takes place under the *ancien régime*, is the story of the labyrinthine inner workings and jealousies of a whole courtyard of concubines of one very rich man. The red lantern is regularly raised before the suite of the concubine with whom the lord and master is spending the night. Ostensibly a criticism of the mores of an earlier era, the film, in the "Aesopian" manner, can be seen as a study of the rivalries, conniving, and treachery within a highly competitive but closed social system—not unlike that of Communist China's walled-off leadership. *Raise the Red Lantern*, like *Ju Dou* nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards, was similarly banned for years in China.

A documentary-style thriller Zhang slipped in among his major films in 1989 was *Operation Cougar*, never shown outside East Asia. This is the story of an air hijacking carried out by a group calling itself the "Taiwan Revolutionary Army Front." The picture's most notable feature is the linking-up of Taiwanese and mainland-Chinese

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anti-terrorist teams to overcome the hijackers, a kind of inter-regime cooperation that has never occurred, or has at least never been admitted, but is curious to contemplate in a movie approved by Beijing.

IN *The Story of Qiu-Ju*, which won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival (the top prize), Zhang deals at last in a serious work with present-day China. The movie is wonderfully acted and directed, and its vivid portrayal of Chinese peasant life is quite unforgettable. The most sophisticated of Zhang's films, it was also the most difficult to get past the censors—and the one in which he had to make a notable concession in his presentation of China's political system.

In a society much of which is still collectivized, and on which the hand of political control still lies heavy, *Qiu-Ju* is the story of an individual's quest for justice, and for respect. The scene is the once-isolated Chinese northwest, now a bizarre jumble of the old and the new. Human beings still sweat under heavy loads and haul wagons like animals, all the while constantly assaulted by roaring buses, hordes of hard-pedaling cyclists, and private automobiles honking them out of the way.

In the midst of a crowded market town, Qiu-Ju's husband lies doubled up on a two-wheeled farm wagon drawn by a plump-faced young countrywoman, his sister. Qiu-Ju (played by the beautiful Gong Li) is many months pregnant, but she and her sister-in-law have hauled her husband from their farm village to the nearby market town to see a doctor, for before the story begins a terrible thing has happened. In their village, Chief Wang, the appointed Communist-party official who runs everything, has knocked down an unauthorized shed built by Qiu-Ju's husband for drying chili peppers. When the husband remarks disdainfully that Chief Wang has "raised only hens," a reference to his having four daughters but no sons, Chief Wang, brutal and abusive, responds by kicking him in the testicles.

Although her husband seems to be on the mend, Qiu-Ju is not satisfied. She is poor. She is illiterate. She is "only" a woman. But an injustice has been done, and she demands an apology from Chief Wang. He refuses, sneers at her contemptuously, declaring, "I am the law." Qiu-Ju lodges a formal complaint against him with the local police, but they too can do little. "At least say some kind words to her," the police tell Chief Wang, but he refuses coldly.

From this point on, the film becomes Qiu-Ju's innocent but stubborn quest for justice. She does not want vengeance. She does not want to see Chief Wang punished. She does not want money. She just wants to have respect shown by a simple apology. As Chief Wang will not apologize, however, Qiu-Ju single-mindedly sets out through ever-higher levels of Chinese officialdom to achieve her aim.

My understanding is that we are not supposed to think Qiu-Ju highly intelligent, but rather possessed of a simple but strong moral sense. Her face, when she is in a confrontation with officials or abroad in big cities to which she is not accustomed, is a study of caution and watchfulness. Purposefully tramping all over northwest China, or hitching rides on wagons and farm trucks, Qiu-Ju has something about her of Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*. In time even her family becomes exasperated with Qiu-Ju; but she will not give up.

A ruling principle of irresponsible bureaucratic systems, particularly authoritarian ones, is that the higher a private person goes in seeking some service, the more aloof and the less accommodating the officials tend to be. Here is the great falsification in *The Story of Qiu-Ju*. For as Qiu-Ju proceeds from local officials, to "the district," to "the city," the Communist-party officials get nicer and nicer. The higher she goes, the kinder, gentler, and more courteous they become, always willing to hear the grievances of the poorest and humblest in their domain. They never take bribes. They lend Qiu-Ju their official automobiles. Even when they can do nothing, they listen with sympathy.

Such behavior reminds me of nothing I ever saw in my own trips to China, and I can only assume that a flattering portrayal of Communist officials—with the exception of Chief Wang—was a price that director Zhang, with his two preceding films banned, thought it wise to pay. There has been a report, in fact, that with the appearance of *The Story of Qiu-Ju*, Zhang's earlier *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* have been cleared for general release in China.

AT THE end of *The Story of Qiu-Ju*, Chief Wang performs what might be seen as an act of contrition. Qiu-Ju goes into labor and Chief Wang heroically gets her to the hospital on time; at the baby's birthday party, he and Qiu-Ju seem to have made their peace. But then one of life's ironies kicks in. An X-ray reveals that in addition to kicking Qiu-Ju's husband in the testicles, Chief Wang has also cracked one of the man's ribs. Now, why cracking a rib should be considered a graver offense than kicking him in the testicles escapes me, but Chief Wang is solemnly sentenced to three weeks in prison.

The film ends with a freeze frame of Qiu-Ju's face. She is grief-stricken. For she is one of the world's holy simpletons. She had not wanted vengeance. She only wanted respect.

Despite its concession to the authorities, *The Story of Qiu-Ju* is a remarkable film. Its theme is universal. In all societies, but particularly in those emerging from severe political repression, individuals crave respect. And in political systems pretending to omniscience and ordering their every action, it is respect that has been denied them.

In the Fifth Generation's movies emerging from mainland China, and in particular in a profound, eloquent film like *The Story of Qiu-Ju*, we are about as far—artistically and morally—from the world of *The Joy Luck Club* as it is possible to get.

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The "Little Woman" of Little Rock

Midge Decter

ANNA QUINDLEN is a woman with a very good job. Indeed, it used to be said of this job that it was one for which some people would be willing to kill: to wit, she is a regular columnist on the op-ed page of the *New York Times*. Twice a week, under the heading "Public & Private," she offers her musings on anything and everything from war to child-rearing. Rumor has it that the *Times* had originally wanted to promote her to a position on the fast track to editorial power but she had declined to take it on the ground that she wanted to stay at home with her children—and so she was given the column instead. Whether or not this rumor is true in every detail, it is surely no exaggeration to say of Anna Quindlen that she is a prime example of what the feminists mean when they speak of "having it all."

Hence readers of the *Times* had reason to be especially interested in her musings on Hillary Rodham Clinton ("The Little Woman," March 9), for the past two years the country's, if not the world's, leading feminist heroine and now under something of a cloud. As it happened, two days earlier Mrs. Clinton's husband, in answer to a reporter's question about Hillary and Whitewater, had spoken feelingly in her defense, particularly in defense of her moral character, saying he knew no one with a keener sense of right and wrong. Quindlen's column was in a way a profession of her uncertainty as to how one ought to feel about this.

The piece begins: "From the moment she first became a major player in national politics, Hillary Rodham Clinton has been a combination of brilliant technocrat, political wife, new woman, savvy adviser, and power behind the throne, confusing and compelling in equal parts." Now, "the more information that emerges about Whitewater, . . . the more central Mrs. Clinton's role becomes. . . ." Thus to deal with the Whitewater problem is to deal with the "Hillary problem." The complex role of "wife-adviser-power-broker" (which Quindlen oddly likens to a gerrymandered congressional district) has left the administration with the need "to develop a historic and extraordinarily difficult role-under-fire for the First Lady important enough to be at the center of a major political mess."

Quindlen agrees that the President really had no recourse but to offer an emotional defense of his wife; had he responded coolly or calmly to the reporter's question, "we pundits would be writing about a rift in the First Marriage." Nevertheless, she goes on, "There's something silly about an I-love-my-wife defense for the most powerful player in the Clinton administration; it's oldthink for a new age."

What is precisely new about this new age, in Quindlen's view, and what she has found most winning about this First Lady, is that Mrs. Clinton arrived on the scene with no excuses for being tough, smart, and willing to fight for her point of view, and that she never characterized opposition to her positions as sexism. "It was clear," Quindlen declares, "that she expected a level playing field."

She should not change now, Quindlen thinks, even though what she is up against is not opposition to her views and policies but "legal investigation and partisan witch-hunt, liberally mixed." It would be "preposterous" to cast her as the "little woman" being put upon by the big bad boys in Congress: "she has been such a towering figure, not browbeaten or outbrained by anyone."

Still—Quindlen continues, wavering—to judge her, in the context of Whitewater, by her capabilities alone is impossible. It is all well and good to say that the price she will have to pay for her power is to face the music as any other political figure would be forced to do. But she is after all *not* like any other political figure: given her husband's "record of cutting and running," if she were not his wife, he would by this time be getting ready to accept her resignation. That he cannot do so without divorcing her is a lucky circumstance "for those of us who believe Mrs. Clinton is a considerable benefit to the country. . . ."

So Hillary Rodham Clinton will once again have to break new ground, "this time as a presidential adviser-spouse in the midst of a political maelstrom." To be sure, it will take no less than a "great mind" to determine how to play this out, but luckily, Quindlen resoundingly concludes, we do in Mrs. Clinton have just such a mind in the White House.

"CONFUSING and compelling," indeed. The confusion with which Quindlen, evidently unbeknownst to her, is struggling here is how to deal with the actual nature and source of Mrs. Clinton's power. Whitewater must be intensifying this confusion considerably, since a woman who really does "expect a level playing field" would be obligated to take her legal and political lumps with the best, or perhaps one should say, the worst, of them—and thus would the First

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Lady be hoist by the petard of women's equality.

But the real problem for Quindlen, along with the rest of Mrs. Clinton's feminist admirers, certainly predates Whitewater. It is not that the First Lady may have done wrong but that it is as the "little woman" and *only* as the little woman that Hillary Rodham Clinton has come to merit their attention in the first place. Quindlen edges up to this point when she says that if Hillary were only Hillary Rodham, the President would now be asking for her resignation; but she quickly shies away, and signs off instead with her ringing affirmation of the greatness of Mrs. Clinton's mind.

THE story of Hillary Rodham is that she was graduated from Wellesley—hardly in itself the mark of a great mind—went on to the Yale Law School—ditto—and there met and married a young man with high political ambitions. In her husband's home state of Arkansas, where he rose to become first Attorney General and then Governor, she practiced law and (as we have now discovered) was even then heavily dependent on her relation to him for the successful conduct of her career. Thus, she was hired by the Rose Law Firm the year he became Attorney General, and she was made a partner the year he became Governor. Her work, moreover, consisted mainly of being a "rainmaker"—i.e., a bringer-in of new clients. Finally, carried to the White House by her husband's election as President, she was, in a break with precedent, handed a major area of policy by him to preside over.

Whatever we might wish to say about all this, we certainly do not have here the profile of some new or unique kind of woman. The country is by now full to the gills with women lawyers—and growing fuller every day. Some of these women lawyers are undoubtedly very clever and others, in the way of things, only ordinary, but few of them, one could safely bet, are as professionally beholden to their husbands as Mrs. Clinton.

Indeed, on the level playing field to which Anna Quindlen alludes, Mrs. Clinton would hardly be "the most powerful player in the Clinton administration"; nor would she have been given authority over health-care reform; nor for that matter would so many questionably qualified women have through her good offices been called upon to bring "diversity" to her husband's administration. So far, given the troubles that this administration has fallen prey to, there are few signs of even the merest political competence, let alone of a "great mind," coming from her quarters in the White House.

THERE is nothing unusual in the inflation of Washington reputations—particularly, these days, if the reputation is that of a woman. But the question to be asked of Anna Quindlen is why someone who has displayed as much independence as she in the arrangement of her own life and career should lend wide-eyed credence to so unsubstantiated a reputation for independence as that of Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The first answer that comes to mind is that Hillary happens not only to be a woman but a woman of the Left. Therefore she can be counted on, in everything that truly matters to someone like Quindlen—that is, to a devoted member of the liberal confession—to have all the right feelings and responses (and Quindlen would by no means be the first to equate agreement with one's own attitudes and feelings with brilliance of mind).

But there is something more to Quindlen's muddle over Hillary than a shared politics. There is a marked and very special kind of shared culture. It is useful to remember that the columnist and the First Lady are basically products of the same generation—not necessarily as that term would be used by a demographer but in the sense of a special social and spiritual cohort. Both of them were, and seem to have remained, part of that postwar spawn in America who grew into adulthood believing themselves to be uniquely endowed with superior qualities of mind and heart.

How and why these people (roughly and not altogether accurately known as the generation of the 60's) were, and still are, permitted to go on setting so high a value on themselves is a story too long, and by now too familiar, to be retold here. But they did, and they do, and they took the election of 1992 to mean that they—whether in government or in some other sector of society—had at last been put into power, and on that happy account the country would now be made over and made new in their own sensitive, idealistic, and altogether wonderful image.

Bill Clinton himself cannot serve as the embodiment of that image: he is a politician ("cutting and running" is Anna Quindlen's phrase for it). Who better, then, than Hillary? That she may be in a lot of trouble need be no hindrance; in fact, it may in the end even help. For she is truly the very incarnation of her generation's culture: someone who enjoys a tremendous amount of unearned admiration and who also makes for herself, and asks others to make for her, a whole set of special allowances.

Clearly she will find Anna Quindlen always at the ready to oblige.

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The Inquisitorial Spirit

THE CONFIRMATION MESS: CLEANING UP THE FEDERAL APPOINTMENTS PROCESS. By STEPHEN L. CARTER. *Basic Books. 208 pp. $21.00.*

Reviewed by SUZANNE GARMENT

STEPHEN L. CARTER, who teaches law at Yale, begins his new book with a benign trick. "Naturally," he observes, "the most vicious confirmation fight in our history was waged to keep a black man off the Supreme Court." Carter then lists the tactics used against the nominee:

> They questioned his intellect and his veracity and the choices he made in his personal life. They made up stories about his ethics. They lambasted him for refusing to answer questions about controversial cases and called him a liar when he said his mind was open. . . .

The man of whom Carter writes, however, is not Clarence Thomas. It is the late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall—whom Southern segregationists tried mightily to deny confirmation, and to whom *The Confirmation Mess* is dedicated.

When people on the political Right argue that the Supreme Court confirmation process has become democratic in the worst sense, they cite the treatment accorded by the Left to Judge Robert Bork. Yet Marshall's story suggests that the Left, too, has reason to worry about today's excesses when it comes to the confirmation of federal appointees in general and Supreme Court nominees in particular. Carter's book expands on this lesson.

In Carter's view, our current confirmation predicament stems from two not-unrelated pieces of history. The first is particularly perverse. Through most of the 19th century, writes Carter, the Senate gave its "advice and consent" on presidential nominations at a relatively early stage of the process. By the time a nomination was finally put forward, prior consultation had done much to ensure that the nominee would be acceptable to the Senate empowered to vote on him.

By the late 19th century, this habit began to change. In an early manifestation of the rationalistic spirit that would suffuse America during the Progressive era, President Rutherford B. Hayes asserted the right to nominate cabinet members without prior congressional consultation. Over time, that insistence became a precedent, and was accorded a great deal of deference.

Yet this new practice had a large unintended consequence. Congress, deprived of much of its wonted capacity to exercise its tastes and policy preferences openly in the confirmation process, soon discovered that in many cases the only practicable way to get rid of an unwanted nominee was to find something wrong with his character. Thus, the role of Congress became less a search for qualifications than a search for disqualifications. And this, in turn, transformed high appointive office into a reward for good behavior in the past rather than a warrant of honorable job performance in the future.

To this set of circumstances, add American moralism and mix well: the result has been the inquisitorial spirit and the passionate search for sin that mark the process today. One way of damning a nominee is to point to some act of personal immorality; here Carter takes as his primary example President Clinton's nomination of the well-qualified Zoë Baird as Attorney General, which failed because of the subsequently notorious Nanny Problem. Another tactic is to declare that a nominee's views lie outside the boundaries of moral decency, otherwise known as the "mainstream."

And this is where the second piece of history comes in. It was the 1954 desegregation decision in *Brown* v. *Board of Education* that changed the role of the federal courts in American political life. Henceforth they would wield vastly increased power over matters of intense concern to the country. This shift in power was soon recognized: that was why those segregationist Senators campaigned so hard, in the name of democracy, to prevent Thurgood Marshall from becoming a Justice.

Over time, liberals began to rely on the power of the courts, and on the independence of the judiciary, as a protection from the demands and passions of democratic politics. They became accustomed to the idea that the courts were their friends, and no wonder: during the early to mid-1960's, Democrats controlled the appointment process, and so relatively liberal judges were produced as a matter of course.

But when Republicans regained the presidency beginning in 1968, that presumption began perforce to change. A crucial departure now took place: many liberal activists responded to the shifting ideological coloration of the courts by rethinking their own support for a strongly independent judiciary. They began to emphasize the importance of a democratic check on the courts, and to assert, in words and deeds, that what mattered was the substantive results of judicial deliberations, and not just the fair application of legal principles.

Thus the way was paved for the campaign against Bork, which Carter sees as very much like the previous campaign against Marshall. In both cases, the country witnessed a massive application of outside political pressure on the Senate; the difference in Bork's case was the mobilization of the modern media, which meant that the charges against him were leveled in an even more inflammatory and sensationalist manner than in Marshall's time. Yet Bork's general position, that popular liberal Court rulings in areas like privacy "lacked firm constitutional

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moorings," was, Carter pronounces, "solidly within the scholarly mainstream."

Just as Carter finds Bork's ordeal very like Marshall's, he draws—less surprisingly—a connection between Bork and Lani Guinier, who stepped down as President Clinton's nominee to head the Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department after the President disowned her views and withdrew his support for her. Carter argues at some length that Guinier, like Bork, is a scholar whose views are well within the bounds of political-moral decency but were distorted by purveyors of hostile sound bites.

The parallel is not quite convincing. Guinier's scholarship is hardly the equivalent of Bork's, and besides, she was a nominee to a partisan policy-making position in the executive branch, not a seat on the supposedly independent Supreme Court.

Carter goes on from Guinier's case to make a more surprising connection: he offers a partial defense of Clarence Thomas. The leak of Anita Hill's allegations against Judge Thomas, which mesmerized the nation and has been described as an act of courage, was not that at all, he writes: "It was, rather, a splendid example of what John le Carré has referred to as 'the selfless and devoted way in which we sacrifice other people.'" Moreover, "the glee with which too many Thomas opponents (particularly white ones) greeted the revelation of Hill's charges was not merely dismaying—it was actually quite frightening." Even if Hill's accusations were true, Carter wonders whether the outcome might not have been better if our confirmation process permitted a nominee, any nominee, to admit guilt, apologize, and have his misdeeds balanced in the senatorial mind by his life's positive achievements.

ALL in all, then, this book makes a strong attack on the barbarous nature of modern confirmations. Yet it is a curious thing: in presenting his case, Carter writes prose clogged with qualifications. Before defending Bork's jurisprudence, for example, Carter hastens to opine that the judge "has much to answer for." In commenting on the Thomas case, he informs the reader that he himself submitted a sworn declaration attesting to Anita Hill's integrity.

In the same manner, he insists that notwithstanding his criticisms, closer scrutiny of nominees is a *good* thing: the problem is just that the Senate and the public use the wrong criteria. Although Senators must not ask improper questions about a nominee's judicial intentions, they should not be kept from asking about a candidate's general moral vision. Carter even hedges on his main contention: while condemning the search for disqualifying traits, he also presents a typology of disqualifications arranged according to degrees of seriousness, on the grounds that if we are going to operate in this way, we should "do it right."

A reader can only guess at the author's purpose but can certainly judge the effect: the book's style—along with its casual, conversational tone and the discursive, see-saw narrative—obscures its case. It is quite as if Carter were aiming to criticize ideological interest groups on the Left as well as the Right, yet worried about exposing himself to criticism as a turncoat from liberalism.

Still, though the trappings are wishy-washy, Carter's main argument is anything but. This book offers a lesson in the perils of the reforming spirit: wishing to cleanse the nomination process of congressional interference, we managed not to eliminate Congress's influence but only to ensure that its participation would be more irresponsible than before. Then, not content with the way Congress was performing its role, we brought modern media skills to bear and made the process more irresponsible still.

On a deeper level, Carter is not talking about process at all. Even the reforms he himself proposes are, as he admits, somewhat beside the point: "Our processes for nominating and confirming Supreme Court Justices and other public officials are not really broken. . . . The trouble, rather, is in our attitudes."

We cannot improve matters fundamentally, Carter maintains, until we recover the sense that an independent judiciary is a necessity, and that particular results are not the only or even the most important products of the judicial process. In the case of the Supreme Court, we will not recover our balance until we stop thinking of the Court as a prize, and as the central focus of politically activist strategies.

If the Court becomes a political player like other players, it will be treated as such, especially in the confirmation process. If we want it treated differently, Carter concludes, we must be willing to diminish its exercise of conventional political power.

Judge Bork could not have said it better.

Multiple-Choice Judaism

THE GOD I BELIEVE IN. By JOSHUA O. HABERMAN. *Free Press. 264 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by JON D. LEVENSON

RECENTLY retired from the rabbinate and various adjunct professorships in Jewish studies, Joshua O. Haberman, a scholar of 19th-century Jewish philosophy, has sought to clarify his own theological positions through "some serious discussions on religious beliefs with a diverse group of prominent Jews, not merely rabbis and theologians but a cross-section of Jewish intellectuals."

The sample, though not scientifically devised, does exhibit considerable diversity: three scientists, two novelists, two philosophers, a hasidic *rebbe*, a hero of the Jewish resistance movement in the Soviet Union, a university president, a convert who has become a rabbi, a theologian, an editor, and a leading Talmudist. The Jewish backgrounds represented run the gamut from that of Philip Leder, the renowned Harvard geneticist, who

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places his Jewish education "on a second- or third-grade level," to that of Adin Steinsaltz, the prolific commentator on the Talmud, who is possessed of an encyclopedic command of traditional rabbinic sources. As for the religious beliefs of the interviewees, these too are widely and interestingly divergent, ranging from the mystical Orthodoxy of Levi Isaac Horowitz (the "Bostoner Rebbe") to the unyielding materialism of Leder, who thinks that "spirituality as we experience it will eventually be explicable in molecular chemical terms."

After a mostly autobiographical introduction, in which Haberman chronicles his own intriguing journey from "a secularized, religiously unobservant family in Vienna" into the American Reform rabbinate, the book consists of fourteen transcribed interviews and a concluding reflection by Haberman. The questions posed to each interviewee are of the sort that "a secularized, religiously unobservant" but thoughtful person would first think to ask a Jewish believer:

> What is the evidence for faith? What is meant by an experience or encounter with God? What is revelation? What happened at Mount Sinai? How can messages from God be verified? Does faith in God affect one's moral life? What does prayer accomplish? Is there a soul and a life hereafter? Are Jews the chosen people? Where was God at the Holocaust? What about the Messiah? Does God act in history? What is the religious meaning of the State of Israel?

Haberman varies the phrasing of his questions to take account of an individual's biography, and sometimes poses a follow-up. This does not, however, provide much mitigation of the major weakness of the book, which is its tendency to read like a questionnaire rather than a set of sustained theological inquiries accessible to laymen.

There are, to be sure, moments that provide a window into deeply moving spiritual struggles, as when Natan Sharansky tells how he reacted when he was about to be released from a Soviet prison camp without his Hebrew Book of Psalms:

> When, at the end of my imprisonment, they took everything from me before sending me away and when they took me to the airfield, I understood that almost all my strength in all those years came from that little book and I cannot leave it. That's why I threw myself into the snow, because I was afraid if I now gave up, I would lose all my world. It summoned up my resistance to the KGB not to let them take away from me all those values.

But such moments do not last long here, and their implications are seldom drawn out in a satisfying fashion. Haberman is continually hurrying to the next question on his checklist.

The answers, too, are often just as unsatisfying—not because an interviewee lacks thoughtfulness (though this is sometimes the case), but because the conversational format does not allow for the careful, nuanced statement the question requires. In some in-

Gertrude Himmelfarb

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stances (notably in the remarks of Steven T. Katz, a scholar of modern Jewish philosophy at Cornell), the replies are more developed, and conversation yields to something like a mini-lecture. But when ideas move to front and center, the sense of the person voicing them necessarily recedes to the point where one wonders whether an anthology of essays might not have been a more appropriate vehicle than a set of transcribed interviews. About half the people who appear here have published such essays, and their ideas are much more compelling in that format than in this one.

Where the interview format does become useful is in exploring religious experience (in contrast to theological opinion). In this domain, there are indeed a few surprises, as when COMMENTARY's editor-in-chief, Norman Podhoretz, mentions "a mystical religious experience [that came] in connection with a crisis, a spiritual crisis. . . ." But even in this case, where the question-and-answer format might have developed something otherwise unavailable, Haberman fails to follow up, preferring to move on to his next big theological issue. Thus, after Podhoretz defines the episode as "a blazing experience of illumination," there is this exchange:

> Q: A sense of release?
>
> Podhoretz: No, a sense of understanding. And what I understood, as I came to think about it, was what the Bible tells us about God and about the nature of the world and about law.
>
> Q: Is God to you a source of ideas or the transcendent creator?

ANOTHER theoretical advantage of the interview format is that it gives the interviewer a chance to put forward opposing considerations, thus forcing the respondent into deeper reflection than a monologue is likely to yield. But here again, Haberman's need to cover the bases and his excessive deference to his distinguished interlocutors cause him to forfeit some precious opportunities.

A particularly poignant example is the statement by the novelist Cynthia Ozick that she totally "reject[s] any notion of afterlife," which Haberman fails to challenge despite the centrality of this idea in the classical rabbinic tradition and Ozick's own membership in an Orthodox synagogue. What is more surprising is that he interviewed her less than three months after his conversation with the Reform theologian Emil Fackenheim, who movingly describes how the Holocaust gave him additional pause about the "silly and superficial" objections to the notion of a world-to-come in Reform Judaism:

> Now what if one were to say with Jewish tradition that all people who had the chance, not only Jews, of course, but others as well, to do something noble, worthwhile, it isn't just the deed which will be forgotten, it's the deed plus the doer. All these have a share in the world to come, but these six million have none? Now that would be a victory for Hitler even beyond the grave. . . . If there is no hereafter for such as these, then the hereafter does not exist. In other words, for anyone thoughtful enough to say at a funeral, we remember that his soul is with God and God remembers his good deeds—for any such person to say that the six million victims of the Holocaust, or the children starving to death in Africa, are forgotten as though they had never been is a most shocking thought and contrary to everything in Judaism.

It is odd that when Ozick dismisses all notions of immortality as "a superstition . . . a pleasant fairy tale," Haberman does not counterpose this meditation by Fackenheim, a man as far from superstition and fairy tale as one can get.

Specifically, Haberman might have challenged Ozick's position by drawing her attention to Fackenheim's implication that without a notion of the afterlife, the Jewish world view ceases to be redemptive and instead becomes tragic. If she were still to dismiss doctrines of an afterlife, Haberman might have pressed her about her affiliation with Orthodoxy, a movement whose liturgy emphatically celebrates redemption and praises God for His resurrection of the dead. Raising these issues would not only have added drama to the dialogue; it would also have imparted a sense that the great issues of Jewish belief were being engaged and not merely reported on, and it would have given us a view of minds in action rather than of people speaking from set positions.

IN HIS afterword, Haberman concludes that:

> In spite of everything, Jews still believe in God and, more or less, still cling to age-old doctrines derived from their monotheistic faith. This is one of the more remarkable conclusions one may draw from our inquiry into the new condition of Jewish beliefs.

Immediately after this, Haberman disclaims any notion that his interviews "constitute a statistically correct sampling of the religious thinking of Jews throughout the world." He still insists, however, that his fourteen prominent intellectuals "may be considered indicative of newly emerging patterns of Jewish religious thought" that give the lie to claims of "religious decline" and "the loss of faith which so often marked previous reports about the Jewish religious condition."

It is true that quantitative instruments can miss profound spiritual and intellectual shifts, especially in the early stages, but the problems with Haberman's sample are greater than he concedes. Can we really conclude that "Jews still believe in God" from a sample half of which is comprised of rabbis, half of them Orthodox? The quantitative measurements that have been made in recent years suggest that the most typical among Haberman's subjects is actually Philip Leder, who has (as he says) a second- or third-grade Jewish education, does not observe *kashrut*, and holds a reductive view of spirituality. But even he, in keenly feeling the claims of Jewish peoplehood and Jewish history, and in being married to an Israeli, is far more committed than most American Jews.

Even in the case of those who explicitly identify with the religious tradition, there is reason to doubt

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Haberman's sweeping judgment that they "still cling to age-old doctrines derived from their monotheistic faith." Cynthia Ozick's quintessentially modern dismissal of the afterlife is one case in point. Another comes from Yeshayahu Leibowitz, the Israeli chemist, neurophysiologist, and Orthodox theologian who—amazingly—brands "belief in God as a redeemer and helper" as "a Christian notion," and calls the messiah "a substitute for faith." Leibowitz demonstrates that the deep skepticism characteristic of modern liberalism can coexist with an eminently premodern and illiberal commitment to the authority and maximal practice of *halakhah* (Jewish law).

In still other cases, a classical Jewish term is retained, but misleadingly, being filled with a completely new and untraditional meaning—as when the novelist Chaim Potok defines "salvation" as "the effort that we put into understanding our deepest selves in the most honest way that we can," thus substituting the self for God in the role of savior. Whether or not this is an "age-old" doctrine of salvation, it is not the Jewish one.

WHAT these examples and others like them suggest—albeit unscientifically—is that a momentous shift has indeed taken place in Judaism in recent years, but not the shift back to traditional faith which Haberman thinks he sees. Instead, the movement has been away from Judaism as an all-embracing, authoritative theological reality and legal order and toward a reconception of it, and of all religion, as a set of options from which the individual is free to draw selectively, in accordance with his preestablished personal values and private preferences. In the new pattern, "choice" becomes the highest good, and the choosing self replaces the creating and commanding God as the source of ultimate authority, substantively redefining while not necessarily dislodging the older theological vocabulary.

As Haberman's interviews demonstrate, the nearly anarchic fluidity that the new individualism promotes can result in some moving accounts of a return to religious experience, faith, and practice. But it is unlikely that a genuine and large-scale renewal of belief in the God of Israel can take place before the extreme individualism of contemporary American Jewish culture has subsided.

After the Fall

RED HUNTING IN THE PROMISED LAND: ANTICOMMUNISM AND THE MAKING OF AMERICA. By JOEL KOVEL. *Basic Books. 331 pp. $25.00.*

Reviewed by HARVEY KLEHR

IN 1988, Joel Kovel, the Alger Hiss Professor of Social Studies at Bard College and a well-known practitioner of "psychohistory," helped to orchestrate a conference at Harvard University that attracted 1,000 academics, community activists, and students. Dedicated to the proposition that anti-Communism had deformed American political, cultural, and social life, the conference alternated between blaming anti-Communism for all the evil in the world and hailing its imminent collapse before the triumphant march of the forces of progress and light.

It was, instead, the Communist world that fell apart within three years. Yet Kovel, only briefly daunted, has now set out to repudiate in theory a set of ideas—anti-Communism—that has been vindicated in practice. *Red Hunting in the Promised Land* offers a breathtaking, even lunatic, reinterpretation of American history in which anti-Communism emerges as the defining American character deformation as well as the founding principle of a corrupt American order. (Kovel spells it "anticommunism" throughout to distinguish it from "anti-Communism," which he pretends to concede is a "more or less

HARVEY KLEHR, *who teaches at Emory University, is co-author of* The Secret World of American Communism, *to be published in the fall by Yale University Press.*

A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness
The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America
FREDERIC COPLE JAHER

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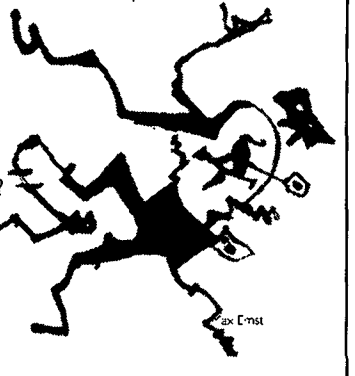

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objective dislike of Communism"; but since he never identifies a single "anti-Communist" in that sense, it is a distinction without a difference.)

The book is organized around a series of psychobiographical portraits meant to illustrate a typology. Thus, Kovel gives us Father Charles Coughlin (anti-Semitic anti-Communism); George F. Kennan (elite Puritan anti-Communism); John Foster Dulles (apocalyptic Christian anti-Communism); J. Edgar Hoover (sexually repressed anti-Communism); Senator Joseph McCarthy (inquisitional anti-Communism); Hubert Humphrey (liberal anti-Communism); Walter Reuther (labor anti-Communism); Arthur Koestler (ex-Communist anti-Communism); and James Angleton (paranoiac anti-Communism).

According to Kovel, the political views of each and every one of these individuals were almost wholly irrational, stemming from deep psychological flaws and weaknesses. In Hubert Humphrey, for example, anti-Communism was "a ritual of male bonding within which the signifier 'father' links Hubert Humphrey, Jr., Hubert Humphrey, Sr., Lyndon Johnson, and the whole ethos of America as a land where 'real men stand tall' and stand together." For J. Edgar Hoover, anti-Communism "might be interchangeably a womb or anus in addition to having moral and racial implications." And so forth.

The disease, it seems, has an etiology. Fittingly enough, the "first red scare" was "the encounter between Puritan and Indian." In that encounter, the Puritans, to avoid facing their own hidden attraction to the primitive communism of the aboriginal inhabitants of North America, defined the Indians as "the Other," pretended they had no civilization, justified their destruction, and then congratulated themselves on their own superior morality. Just like anti-Communists in the 20th century.

What is to be done? Outliving the fall of Communism itself, anti-Communism ensures the triumph of business elites, the "worship of the almighty market," and the glorification of consumerism. Indeed, by linking America's future to its past, "anti-Communism destroys time itself." Only by finally slaying this dragon will Americans have any hope of escaping "a world headed toward ecological destruction while it consigns billions of human beings to brutal poverty." Yet consider the odds against this happening:

> Germany can admit the Holocaust and Russia the crimes of Stalinism, but America, the "Redeemer Nation," has never been able to take responsibility for starting and sustaining the nuclear arms race, or for using the weapon as an instrument of policy.

IT WOULD be fun—on second thought, it would not be fun—to catalogue the idiocies of this book, which range from gross errors of fact, to fabrication of evidence, to the author's apparent belief that his own psychological ruminations constitute historical proof. (Kovel asserts at one point that he "can testify from direct experience that a shadow of unimaginable dread seemed to have arrived, unbidden, to curse our existence in the postwar era.") But the simple point is this: after the fall of Communism, we were told confidently that now the anti-Communists of the West, having lost the object of their hatred and thus their very reason for being, were headed for a deep moral and spiritual crisis. From the desperation manifest on every page of this book, it would appear that the shoe is very much on the other foot.

Spiritual Goods

SELLING GOD: AMERICAN RELIGION IN THE MARKETPLACE OF CULTURE. By R. LAURENCE MOORE. *Oxford. 288 pp. $25.00.*

Reviewed by PETER L. BERGER

IN THIS book R. Laurence Moore, who teaches history at Cornell, takes the reader on a guided tour of the interaction between religion and commercialism in the United States from the early 19th century to the present time. As a guide he is very well informed, articulate—and brash. His opening sentence sets the tone:

> I follow religion with much the same exuberant spirit that many of my friends follow baseball. Readers offended by the suggestion that religion exerts an appeal analogous to that of a form of commercial entertainment might as well stop here.

In this age of institutionalized irreverence, one wonders just who Moore thinks would be offended by his breezy approach to the sacred: perhaps there are some in certain fundamentalist enclaves, but hardly at Cornell, or among people who read books published by the Oxford University Press. I, at any rate, found Moore's book quite well, even pleasurably, written, but his tone periodically annoying and, what is worse, detracting from an otherwise interesting thesis.

That thesis is very clear and is argued consistently throughout: once the United States effectively enacted the separation of church and state, organized religion had to sell itself to an uncoerced and increasingly choosy clientele. In so selling themselves, the churches almost inevitably adopted many of the techniques of capitalist marketing. Indeed, religion *became* a market commodity, along with all other freely available goods and services.

But religion, says Moore, was not simply a passive instrument of this capitalist dynamic. Rather, the clergy and other purveyors of religion actively and often ingeniously shaped strategies of survival and success, and these strategies had powerful consequences in the larger society—as witness, for example, the continuing power in America of ideologies of health and abstemiousness originally pioneered by the "muscular Christians" of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the censorious agitators of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Our current anti-

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smoking campaign is a marvelous case in point of apostolic succession.

In other words, there has been a reciprocal influence, even an intermingling, between religion and commercial culture over the last century-and-a-half of American history. That is why Moore believes it is misleading to look upon this period as one of progressive secularization, for unlike what occurred in Europe, religion in America has not declined in prominence or cultural efficacy. What characterizes the American development, he writes, is not secularization, but rather "commodification." One may not like this much, on theological or on aesthetic grounds, but it is the necessary price of religious and indeed of cultural liberty.

Moore begins his story in the 19th century because the legal disestablishment of religion and the opening-up of a laissez-faire religious market were clearly in place by then. Spreading literacy provided a growing clientele for the products of religious publishing, whose "moral sensationalism," as exemplified by the American Tract Society (founded in 1825), was a prototype of subsequent development: in such works, the reader was simultaneously entertained and edified, with the line between the two often somewhat unclear.

The same mix of entertainment and edification was to be found in the tradition of what Moore calls "religious spectacles"—all those glittering performances, from Henry Ward Beecher to Billy Graham, on pulpits and from the stages of revival tents. With rising affluence, to adapt the words of one of Moore's chapter headings, Americans learned to play and religion learned to let them. The "legitimate" theater, as distinguished from the morally dubious entertainments of vaudeville and burlesque, earned its honorific adjective precisely because the Protestant guardians of morality eventually bestowed on it their stamp of approval.

A fascinating success story was that of the Chautauqua Association, whose origins lay in the Meth-

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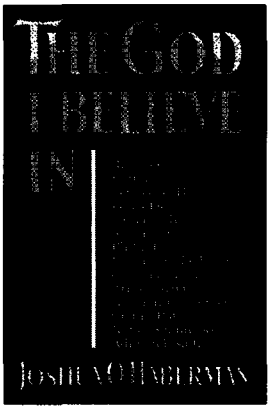

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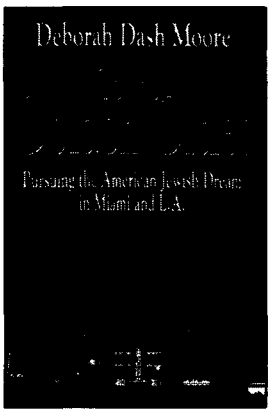

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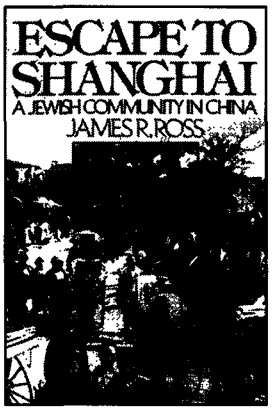

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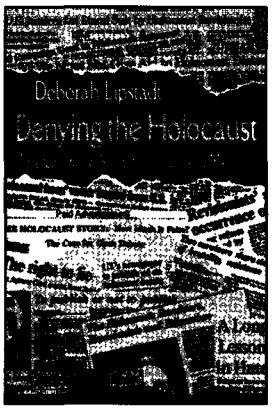

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odist invention of religious family camps where "tennis, ocean-bathing, and salvation under proper sponsorship worked together." To this irresistible mix Chautauqua added high culture, and in the process not only opened up yet another market for religion but started the immensely successful American institution of continuing adult education.

In the 20th century, the advent of modern mass media created new opportunities for religious marketing, opportunities that were vigorously exploited by different groups within the denominational spectrum. Moore makes a good case for the view that there was nothing fundamentally new in this technological development. The latest entry in the field is represented by so-called New Age groups, of which L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology is a highly successful example.

EARLY on, Moore describes himself as a "secularist," which minimally means that he has no theological ax to grind. It also refers to a methodological position: "It seems axiomatic to me that religion as a system of belief is not inherently different from any other system of belief."

As a historian dealing with religion, Moore is of course fully entitled to adhere to the same canons of empirical inquiry that would be applied to other elements of human culture. Yet it hardly follows from this that the historian cannot perceive what is indeed distinctive about religion. As one reads this book, one rarely senses that its author acknowledges the (empirically evident) fact that here were people struggling with their faith and their conscience, and not simply worried about securing their religious market share. It is a little as if someone were to write a history of modern philosophy solely in terms of the vicissitudes of the academic job market or the highbrow publishing industry. The perspective has its uses, but it is rather abridged.

That aside, there is another aspect of Moore's thesis that may be questioned. He gives what is probably undue credit to American constitutional arrangements for the emergence of the religious marketplace. In doing so, he is in good company: at least since Tocqueville, others have ascribed the vitality and inventiveness of American religion to the same cause. Nor can there be any doubt that the separation of church and state was an important causal factor. But there were others as well.

The American commercial culture that entered into a symbiosis with religion was different from similar cultural constellations in Europe. Apart from some not very successful attempts in the Old South, America never possessed an aristocratic culture (like the one which Matthew Arnold, whom Moore quotes, could rely upon). American culture was a bourgeois culture from the beginning—which is to say, it was of the same class that created modern capitalism, and consequently it had a relatively uncomplicated (one might say, an innocent) relationship with the values of commercialism. This helped account both for its often unreflective robustness and for its unembarrassed vulgarity.

Most importantly there was, and is, the dynamic of pluralism, a social phenomenon not necessarily linked to the peculiar American political system. Pluralism appears wherever various ethnic and religious groups live together under conditions of civic peace. If social circumstances permit these groups to interact freely, a sort of religious and cultural market is likely to develop even when formal constitutional arrangements do not fully acknowledge it. Thus, a pluralistic religious market emerged in England in the 19th century despite the official establishment of the Anglican Church, and similar developments can be observed in other European countries where there has been both social diversity and a modicum of religious liberty. This is not to deny the distinctive features of the American case; but one should also not exaggerate American "exceptionalism."

MOORE is correct to point out the profound links among capitalism, democracy, and pluralism, and the way in which religion, operating under conditions determined by these three powerful forces, must sell itself in a cultural market. Such salesmanship may often trivialize faith in the perspective of committed believers, and it may offend the sensibilities of those with a stake in high culture. But not only is this the unavoidable price of religious liberty; in a pluralistic situation, it is also the precondition of theologically serious projects.

The same liberty that allows Jim and Tammy Bakker to set up their Pentecostal amusement park at "Heritage USA" also makes possible the existence of Trappist monasteries and centers of theological scholarship—just as, in a different sphere, it permits the coexistence of Harvard University and outfits that hawk mail-order Ph.D.'s on matchbook covers. On balance, the liberating air of pluralism has been a good thing for religion and culture alike.

The Greatest Conflict

A WORLD AT ARMS: A GLOBAL HISTORY OF WORLD WAR II. By GERHARD L. WEINBERG. *Cambridge. 1,225 pp. $34.95.*

Reviewed by WILLIAMSON MURRAY

AT A MOMENT when the writing of history has been reduced to narrow and politically-correct accounts of victims, class struggle, gender issues, and repressive social conventions, all written in excruciatingly dull prose, Gerhard Weinberg of the University of North Carolina has provided us with a book that is huge in scope, generously inclusive in conception, and a pleasure to read. In 920 pages of text and an additional 205 pages of bibliographical essay and footnotes, Weinberg has produced no less than the definitive political and strategic history of World War II.

He comes to the task as the dean of European diplomatic history in the United States and the author of a two-volume study of Nazi foreign policy from 1933 to 1939, as

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well as another book on the Nazi-Soviet pact. Having been at the business of serious history for nearly 40 years, Weinberg is able to draw here on a deep mastery of the relevant literature and an unqualified grasp of archival sources, particularly German, American, and British.

But Weinberg is more than an academic historian bombarding his reader with facts and references. He brings to this study a point of view, and a methodology. He is, for one thing, morally outraged at the events that occurred between 1939 and 1945; though for the most part his feelings are tempered by a clear, cool judgment, anger simmers beneath the surface. Equally telling is Weinberg's decision to focus on the *individuals* who conducted the war; unlike historians besotted with the workings of impersonal bureaucracies or the supposedly determinative movements of unnamed "forces," Weinberg refuses to minimize the role of individuals in causing and shaping events. Foremost among these, of course, was Adolf Hitler, whose ideas exercised a terrible hold not only on German politics, but, as Weinberg shows, on German strategy and even on German operational decision-making.

Thus, Weinberg departs from the current tendency in historical analysis to regard the whole period from 1914 to 1945 as a single continuum: the European Civil War. Such an approach does offer advantages, but, Weinberg argues correctly, it also holds pitfalls, the principal one being that it obscures the major difference between World Wars I and II.

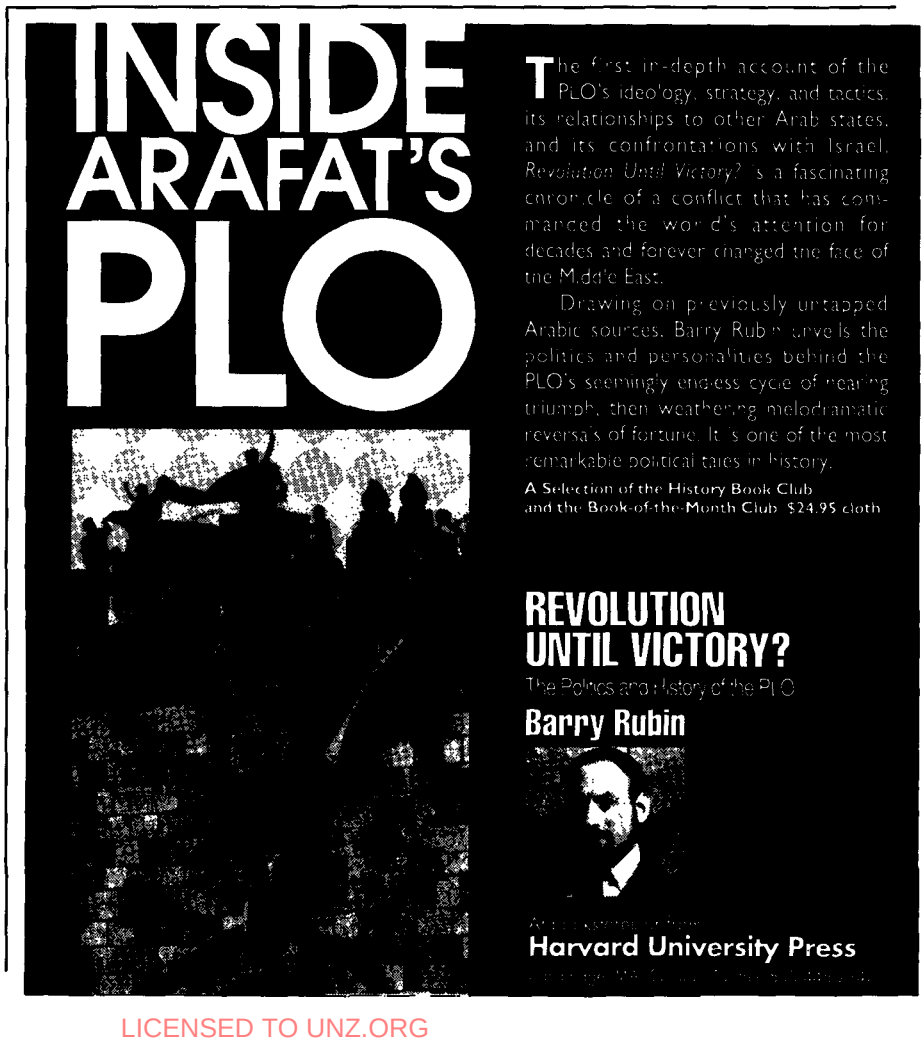
That difference lay in intent. World War II was Hitler's war, a war deliberately provoked by the dictator in pursuit of a megalomaniacal aim: a radical revision of the world. As Weinberg writes:

> This was, in fact, a struggle not only for control of territory and resources [like World War I] but about who would live and control the resources of the globe and which people would vanish entirely because they were believed inferior and undesirable by the victors.

Consequently, to understand the decisions that Hitler and his military advisers made, one must grasp the ideological framework within which they operated. German war strategy, in Weinberg's view, owed more to Hitler's conception of "International Jewry" than to any other factor—economic, military, or social. And as the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" was bound up with an ideology that aimed to subjugate Europe's Slavic populations as well, so the story of Germany's operational conquest of much of Europe is also the story of the decisions that deliberately paved the way for the Holocaust.

For those who have kept up with the scholarly literature, Weinberg's discussion of the wholesale cooperation of the German military with the various and extensive criminal activities of the SS will not come as a surprise. For the nonspecialist, however, he has laid out in excruciating detail the enthusiastic acceptance of Hitler's ideological designs by the senior leadership of the German army. That acceptance had a direct effect on virtually every decision made during the war—including the most disastrous. For example, Weinberg clearly shows that the constant and continuous German underestimation of the Red Army, right up to the moment of final defeat in 1945, was the result of the German military's unshakable belief in its racial superiority. (A similar blindness, he argues convincingly, caused both Hitler and Germany's military leadership to dismiss the United States as a credible opponent.)

More than an account of how Nazi Germany lost the war, Weinberg's history is also a careful analysis of how the three Allied powers—Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union—waged *their* war to destroy Nazi Germany. Weinberg is particularly good on the evolution of the special relationship between America and Britain, its successes as well as its difficulties. And he is no less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satisfying on the sinister policies of the Soviet Union.

Stalin's regime made its deal with Hitler in August 1939 in the hope that it would lead to a massive bloodletting among the capitalist powers. Even after France collapsed, and the Soviets found themselves alone on the European continent with Nazi Germany, *their* ideological preconceptions persuaded them that, as a capitalist power, Nazi Germany would be satisfied with its conquest of Western Europe. Since he was only the tool of "monopoly capitalism," Hitler's ravings about *Lebensraum* were not to be taken seriously.

So it was that, despite its best efforts, the Soviet Union found itself an unwilling participant in a war it had done a very great deal to bring about. These early miscalculations, and the resulting catastrophic defeats for Russia, led Stalin to rail against Britain and the United States for failing to create a second front—a failure, he alleged, designed deliberately to bleed the Soviet Union to death. But, as Weinberg points out, the Allied powers' Combined Bomber Offensive did represent a second front, one that placed increasing pressure on the German economy and German military capabilities from 1942 on. The Battle of the Atlantic similarly engaged huge resources on the part of the Germans that could have been used fighting in the east.

WEINBERG devotes careful attention as well to the war in the Pacific. Here he underlines the failure of the Axis powers, Germany and Japan, to cooperate in their extravagant efforts to seize vast new empires. This lack of strategic synergy only served to magnify their individual difficulties. Throughout the war, for instance, American lend-lease flowed across the Northern Pacific; despite desperate pleas from the Germans, the Japanese refused to take any action that might disturb the Soviets. Undoubtedly they were motivated in part by the memory of the defeat of Japanese troops by the Red Army in 1939; but the threat that the U.S. might utilize air bases in Siberia to strike at the Home Islands also stayed the Japanese hand. Weinberg's discussion of these issues demonstrates his fine ability to explicate the interplay among vast and seemingly unrelated events.

As was the case with the Nazis in the territories they conquered inside the Soviet Union, the Japanese might have come as liberators to the Western colonies in Asia that they took over in 1942. But Japanese arrogance, contempt for other races, and habitual mistreatment of subject populations soon extinguished whatever sympathy existed for Japan in Asia. In fact, one suspects that the postwar rejection of colonialism by the Asian peoples may have owed much to the failure of their colonial masters to protect them from the Japanese during the war.

In the end, the Germans quit in May 1945 and left the Japanese to continue fighting. Weinberg demolishes claims that the Japanese were themselves desperately trying to exit the war in the summer of 1945. The messages the Tokyo government sent to its embassies in Moscow and elsewhere were so naive that its own envoys cabled back to urge a greater sense of realism. Truman, a man who had been on the sharp end of war as an artillery officer in 1918, saw the American casualty totals at Iwo Jima and Okinawa and drew the sensible conclusion: the atomic bomb was the only alternative to even greater casualties that would be brought about by an invasion of Japan. In making the hard decision, he avoided what would have been, as he later put it, "an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other."

THIS, then, is the premier study of the catastrophic years between 1939 and 1945. It is a story of horror and evil, but also, on the Allied side, of strategic and political wisdom. In the deluge of books marking the seemingly endless 50th anniversaries of World War II battles, this one stands well above the rest, a benchmark for anyone who seeks truly to understand the greatest conflict in human history.

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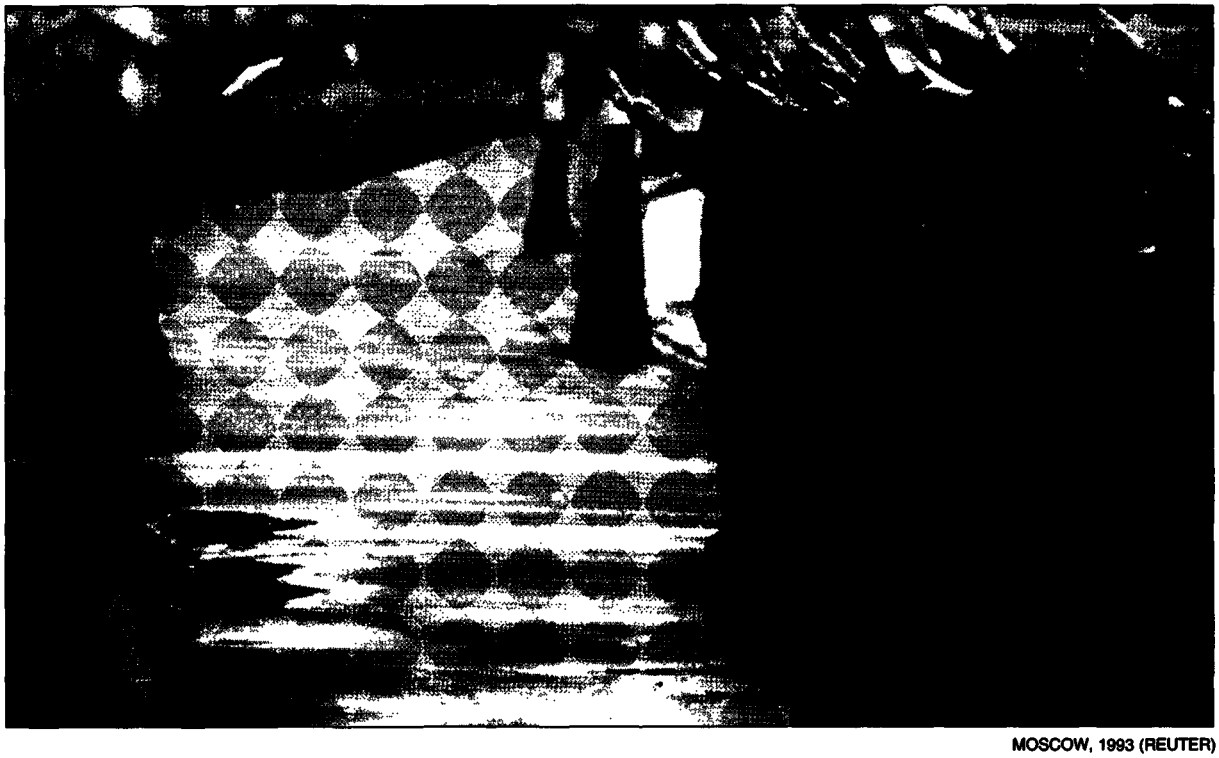

MOSCOW, 1993 (REUTER)

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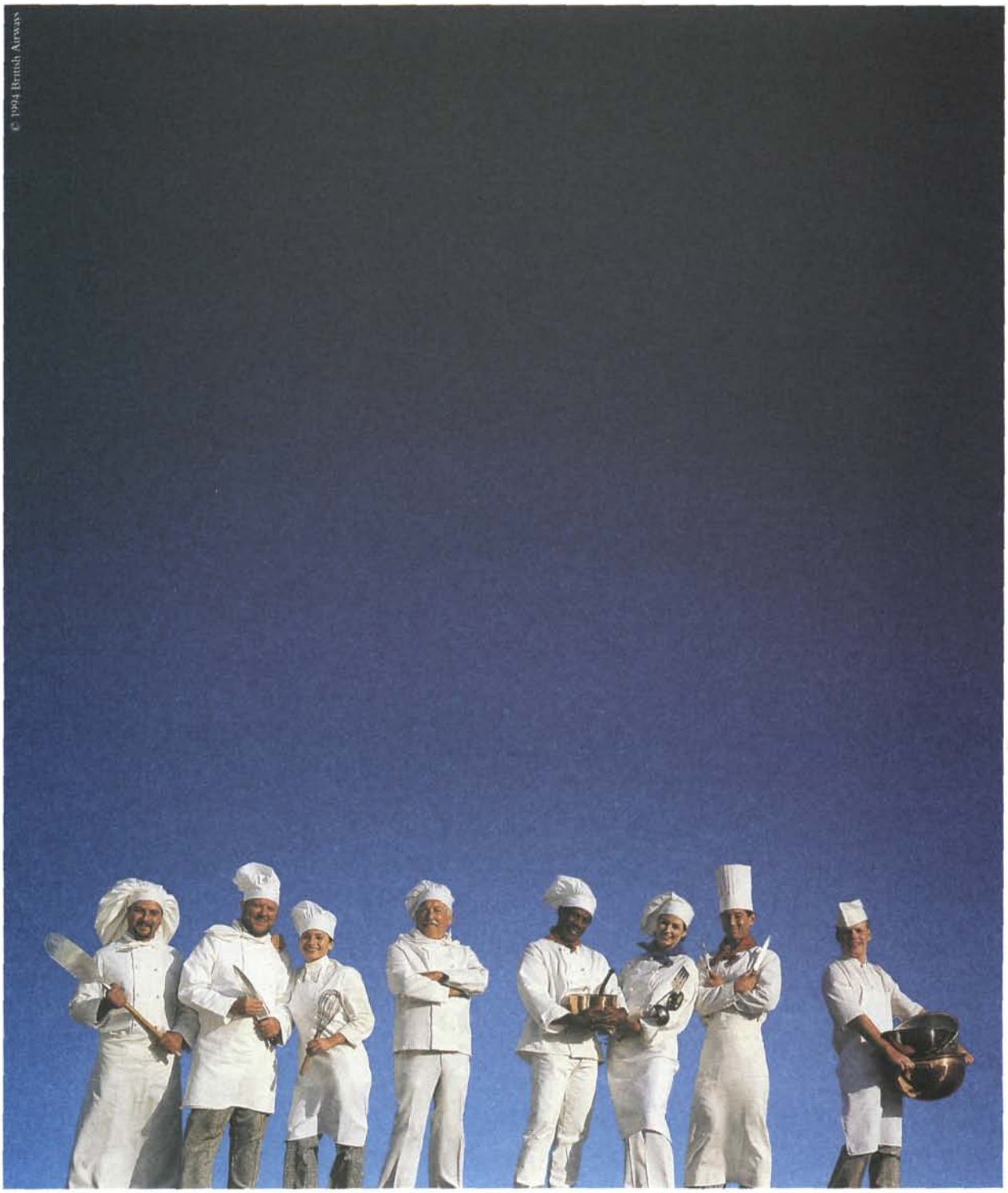

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